

## EL SOMBRIO

"No sense paying big bucks for cheeseburgers when your dog will like something else better," Donella. "That's a gamble we'll have to take," Sirocco said. "Sterm will hardly order them to fire on the rest of the ship if he's in it." While Alan Jackson filled the jukebox with a melancholy lament about loneliness, Noah fished the. When Noah stopped at the corner, the Navigator halted half a block behind him. The driver waited to. Sound returned to the tape. Over a background crash-and-clatter of Chevy-bashing, the directional. "It is, but nothing in there's to be touched until Mrs. Kalens has been back to get some stuff," the guard answered. "She should be on her way down just about now." of the painful past on which her life was built. She slid her guarded dessert, untouched, in front of Leilani. "What from?". roofs, sirens silent, are departing the interstate. They descend the gently sloped embankment and. dragged so low by her demons and her drugs that she was less likely to be found in an armchair than. From the center of the floor Wellesley asked, "What do you want?". Seated, bowing her head, Geneva offered a succinct but heart felt prayer: "Thank you, God, for. when she put it down. One of the figures was a bearded, dark-haired man whom Colman recognized as Leon, sitting alongside a brown skinned woman identified by the caption at the bottom of the picture simply as Thelma. So at least some of them were located at the arctic scientific establishment in northern Selene, Colman thought to himself. The other pair of figures were Otto, of Asiatic appearance, and Chester, who was black; the ones shown alone in the remaining two sections of the screen were Gracie, another Oriental, and Smithy, a blond Caucasian with a large moustache and long sideburns. From their ages they were all evidently Founder. Kath introduced each of them in turn without mentioning titles, responsibilities, or where any of them were, and the Terrans didn't ask.. was shoved away roughly. "Get off, you clumsy asshole," the guard growled. Panic-stricken, Driscoll grabbed the handle of the trolley, and fled in through the doorway.. thoroughbred but performed like a worn-out plow horse.. it sooner wasn't a failure of mind or muscle, but a collapse of reason, the result of runaway fear.. Instead of a lawn with trees, a narrow covered patio shaded the front entrance. Here in back, a strip of. Micky watched their guest take a long drink. "Don't try to fool me, mutant girl. You're not so cool that. Half the Army seemed to have converged on the west gate, where a group of escapees had been run to ground and were shooting it out. When the confusion was at its peak, a series of thunderous explosions blanketed the Detention Wing and the depot with smoke. When the smoke cleared, one of the transporters was gone. No one had been guarding the motor pool.. In addition to surprise, however, the boy has Old Yeller. And the dog has teeth. Curtis has teeth, too.. Jay blinked and looked up to find Pernak watching him curiously. For an instant he felt guilty and at a loss for the explanation that seemed to be called for. "Bernard told me about it," Pernak said before Jay could offer anything. "I guess he's under a lot of pressure right now, so don't read too much into it." He stared at the box in Jay's hand. "I don't see anything--not a damn thing. Come on, Jay. Let's take a look at that loco of yours." That was why Colman had no doubt in his mind that the Chironians had had nothing to do with the bombings. He had talked to Kath, and she had assured him no Chironians would have been involved. It was an act of faith, he conceded, but he believed that she knew the truth and had spoken it. The Chironians had reacted to Padawski in the way that Colman had known instinctively that they would--specifically, with economy of effort, and with a surgical precision that had not involved the innocent.. T-shirt. The impressive mass of bone in his brow surely weighed more than the five-pound sledge that he. "Oh, that's sad. You resorted to an arbitrary number. That reveals a shallow capacity for independent." "We never said it was," Kath replied. "You assumed it. So did Sterm." Bernard gaped at her as the enormity of what she was saying suddenly dawned on him. Kath's expression 'was grave, but nevertheless there was a hint of mirth dancing at the back of her eyes. "We could hardly disguise our scientific work," she said. "It had to be seen to serve some legitimate purpose, and an antimatter drive seemed suitable. But the Kuan-yin project has been low down on our list of priorities." Sirocco turned to Malloy, while in the background the last of the figures came through. "Okay, you know where to go. Hanlon should be there now with the others." Malloy nodded. "We'll make a soldier out of you yet," Sirocco said to Celia. "You're doing fine. Almost there now." Celia returned a thin smile but said nothing. She moved away with the others toward the far side of the compartment. Meanwhile Stanislaw had set up the compack and was already calling up codes onto the screen. He had practiced the routine throughout the day and was quickly through to the schedule of SD guard details inside the Government Center, for the bar. "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." "Are there any more objectors?" Sterm inquired. Behind him Wellesley, white faced and haggard, slumped into his chair. "It's my table, so I'll say grace my way, without editorial comment," Geneva declared. "And when I'm. every time." Finally he smiled.. bales, ounces, pints, and gallons of illegal substances had stolen less of her beauty than seemed either. "But it's there, just the same. And I think maybe ... I was afraid if I ever talked about it, I might let go of. CHAPTER SEVEN. out of the booth and rose to his feet. "You wouldn't do something stupid like take the money and then not." "Yeah, I heard that somewhere," Leilani replied, picking up her fork. Returning to her chair, Geneva said, "So, Micky, will we all be getting together for a neighborly. reflected light of the radio readout.. An SD sergeant interrupted from behind Lesley. "They're here sir. Carriers coming through the lock." They looked round to find the first vehicles crammed with troops, many of them in suits, and weaponry slowing down as they passed through the space between the lock doors, and then speeding up again without stopping as they were waved on through. More followed, their occupants looking formidable and determined, and Lesley gave orders for them to be directed between the remaining three feeder ramps to get close to the Battle Module at all four of its access points.. were the same people who had driven him out of the mountains and west through Grand Junction. He has. Pernak rose from the desk at

which he had been working, and moved over to the window to gaze down at the lawns between the two arms that formed the front wings of the building. A lot of staff and students were beginning to appear, some lounging and relaxing in the sun and others playing games in groups here and there as the midday break approached. He was used to living among people who expressed feelings of insignificance and fear of a universe which they perceived as cold and empty, dominated by forces of disintegration, decay, and ultimately death—a universe in which the fragile oddity called life could cling precariously and only for a fleeting moment to a freak existence that had no rightful place within the scheme of things. Science had probed to the beginnings of all there was to know, and such was the bleak answer that had been found written. "They're not all like that, are they?" Bobby asked, looking hopefully at Colman..mountain with a shaved head and a nose ring. The Chevy stood in an open space midway between.BVG 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1."There's been one in the Battle Module," Brad told. him, sounding out of breath. "A bunch of us tried to take over in there after the broadcast, but there were too many who figured that was the safest place to be and wouldn't quit. It was all we could do to get out."..borne out; and although her hope had grown stronger, perhaps her faith had not..little."The concrete floor, painted ruby-red, appeared to have been mopped at least a couple times since.Bernard snapped his fingers. "Of course, Colman! Why the hell didn't I think of that?""Sirocco marched smartly through the connecting ramp into the Kuan-yin, where he stepped to the left and snapped to attention while Colman and Hanlon led the guard sections by with rifles sloped precisely on shoulders, free hands swinging crisply\_ as if attached by invisible wires, and boots crashing in unison on the steel floor plates. They fanned out into columns and drew up to halt in lines exactly aligned with the sides of the doorway. Behind them the officers emerged four abreast and divided into two groups to follow Colonel Wesserman to the left and General Portney to the fight.."SD's," Swyley murmured, without moving his mouth. His eyeballs shifted sideways and back again a few times to indicate the direction over his right shoulder. A more restrained note crept into the place, and the atmosphere took on a subtle tension..Pernak shrugged. "Just let the system die naturally."..he has the instincts of a survivor. His wariness must be taken seriously. Evidently, something in the night.dresser, dropping ice cubes in the glass. After uncapping the vodka, she hesitated before pouring. But..thanks to old Sinsemilla's performance. If you really want to know about Preston Claudius Maddoc,.His debut into life had been very different. The war had left his parents afflicted by genetic damage, and their first two children had not survived infancy. Aging prematurely from side effects, they had known they would never see Chiron when they brought him aboard the Mayflower II as a boy of eight and sacrificed the few more years that they might have spent on Earth in order' to give him a new start somewhere else. Paradoxically, their health had qualified them favorably in their application to join the Mission since the planning had called for the inclusion of older people and higher-risk actuarial categories among the population to make room for the births that would be occurring later. A dynamic population had been deemed desirable, and the measures taken to achieve it had seemed callous to some, but had been necessary..Cliff Waiters would never have gotten himself into a stupid situation like that. So what if Walters did sometimes turn a blind eye to little things that didn't matter anyway? Walters was a lot smarter when it came to the things that did matter. So much for Fallows, the smartass kid shuttling up from Arizonian to save the universe, who still hadn't learned how to keep his nose clean. Cliff Waiters had earned every pip of his promotions, Fallows conceded as part of his self-imposed penance; and he had earned every year of being a nonentity on Chiron that lay ahead'. Someday, maybe, he'd learn to listen to Jean..with the moon retiring behind blankets of clouds in the west and the sun still fast abed in the east,.demand. Since we are not talking about a technologically backward environment, a considerable degree of expertise in modern industrial processes would be essential to the fulfillment of that obligation, which gives us, in Engineering, an indispensable role. I trust you see my point."..Instead of a bath, she took a shower. Her soap of choice?a cake of Ivory?worked well enough to.Sirocco shrugged. "Don't ask me. I thought it was because a lot of SD's are shipping down to Canaveral. I just do what the orders say."..She wasn't an alcoholic, after all. She didn't drink or feel the need to drink every day. Stress and..Some of the station's huge storage tanks hold diesel fuel, which is combustible but not highly explosive,..he'd no doubt be left with a hand full of bones as shattered as the windshield.."You think so?"..from her brain probably blew out power-company transformers all over the Bay Area. Great pie, Mrs..we'll get there while the action is still hot. The only reason we're renting next door for a week is because..Stormbel was a short, stocky, completely bald man with pale, watery eyes and an expression that never conveyed emotion. A thin moustache pencil-lined his upper lip. He put his hands on his hips and stared for a few seconds at the gaping faces before him. "This Congress is dissolved," he announced in his thin but piercing, high-pitched voice. "The Mission is now under the direct command of the Military." He turned his head to Borftein "You are relieved of command of both the regular and Special Duty forces. Those functions are now transferred to me."..As the Windchaser slows steadily, Curtis slides shut the window and takes up a position at the bedroom."Skin cancer kills," the girl explained..Lesley nodded. "He's been there all evening. Arrived around 1800 with Stormbel for a staff conference with the high command. They're all in there ..~." He frowned at the expression on Colman's face. "Nobody knew?""The trailer is oddly constructed, with a pair of large doors on the side, instead of at the back. An instant..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."..For longer than she could remember, Micky hadn't allowed herself to be emotionally affected by anyone..her rage. She'd become a drinker because booze inflamed the anger, and for so long she'd cherished her..third swing, the serpent met the furniture with a crack of skull that took all the wriggle out of it forever..more attitude than Schwarzenegger with a bee up his ass, although they're wanted by the FBI and surely."That's Jay. Jay, this is Bret--Bret Hanlon. He runs one of the other platoons and teaches unarmed combat. Don't mess with him."..The SD major completed dictating his notes on the final witness's statement

into his compad and walked to where the two young women and the man were sitting. Their expressions as they looked up at him were not apprehensive or apologetic, but neither were they defiant, the deed was unfortunate but it had been necessary, the faces seemed to say, and there was nothing to feel guilty about. If anything, they seemed curious as to how the Terrans were going to handle the situation, as did the other Chironians looking on..beneath interlaced boughs that have provided only an occasional brief glimpse of the night sky..speaking a word to each other, they move on, away from the truck.."Five-sub-three primary's starting to play up again, you'll be happy to hear. Low-level profile, but it's positive, We had a one-fifteen second burn on vernier two at seven\* teen hundred hours, which went okay. The main burn is behaving itself fine and correcting for trim as programmed .... ' He shrugged. "That's about it.".this chill of helplessness, familiar to her since childhood, an icy resentment sometimes formed, and from it.Driscoll met her eyes calmly. "I'd risk it," he said. "Sure, if this was for real, I'd put money on it.".After he puts down the extinguished flashlight, as he pulls the curtains aside, plastic rings scrape and click.bathroom break, they are intent on getting away from flying bullets..By the time the flyer touched down at the front of the house, Celia's earlier nervousness had given way to a stoic resignation to the fact that she was now committed. She had gambled that Sterm would accept her desire to return to her home as normal feminine behavior and that because he believed her to be helpless and without anyone else to run to anyway, the thought of her trying to escape would not enter his mind seriously. That - was just how it had worked out; her three SD guards and a matron had orders to keep her under observation and from talking to anybody, but she was not considered to be a prisoner. Her only worry now was that Veronica might have failed to contact Colman or that for some reason he might have been unable to 4? anything..The chopper might not be aloft yet, just getting up to power while the troops reboard..He watched her walk away. Then between long swallows, he studied his beer as though it meant.of The X-Files, kid.".as heartworm, but I guess it's a perfectly respectable parasite. Anyway, I assure you with all.To the girl, Geneva said, "So you don't believe Lukipela went off with aliens.".obtain aspirin, but ice-cold Dos Equis would be available..The girl stamped her left foot on the ground, causing the leg brace to rattle softly. She raised her left.Stanislaw and two others, moving carefully and making use of cover since they were now in a part of the complex that was being used, headed for the storeroom near the front foyer of the Communications Center to join Hanlon's group, which by now should have been swollen by the arrival of Celia, Malloy, and Fuller; Sirocco took three more to where another group was assembling near the approaches to the rear lobby; and Bernard with his toolbox strolled away casually on his own toward the corridor that connected the Communications Center to the main entrance of the complex..Colman swiped his face with a towel, tossed the towel to Stanislaw, and snatched a shirt from a closet. "Do me a favor and straighten out this mess," he said. He put on his cap as he walked out the door, and still buttoning his blouse, hurried away toward the Orderly Room.."But she sure does give the man major class and respectability. Now you go out there and do the right.exhilarating journey.."I wish I'd heard them back when I could've helped you." "That was all a long time ago, Aunt Gen."..which is probably something more psychologically complex, as before..Leaving Colonel Oordsen peering out of the screen, Lesley rose and walked through the door in the steel wall."It was a depressed fracture," said Geneva. "Bone chips in the brain. A blood clot."..By the time Mrs. Sharmer had left his office at the end of that first meeting, Noah's determination to

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