

Anthon Hillar could not quite get over his awe at the luxuriousness of the Regional Planning Director's office—and at the security measures which the government seemed to consider necessary. The director, a man of abnormally healthy and well-fed appearance, sat behind a massive desk with a row of lights spelling out "Olaf Karper" and stared at Anthon with an expression of mild amusement. But he stared by means of a closed-circuit television system, as if afraid to expose himself to the actual presence of a common person. And Anthon suddenly realized from the expression on the bureaucrat's face that he was not being taken at all seriously. "Well, then," he asked, suddenly defensive, "may I presume to ask what you think the stars are?"

Karper flashed a sardonic grin, apparently meant for someone out of view in his inner office. "I don't waste a great deal of thought on them," he confessed with a shrug. "I suppose they're what the nursery rhymes say—globes of fire, or something, somewhere off in the sky. So what? Hardly matters to command much of the attention of a busy administrator here on Earth."

"But they *are!*" Anthon insisted, leaning earnestly forward in the uncomfortable straight chair provided for visitors. "If these books I've found are right, they may be very important indeed. If they really are like other suns, pouring light and heat on other planets like Earth—or like Earth used to be—and if we can find ways to send people there ... " He saw how little impression he was making on the Regional Director and his voice sagged as he finished, "They could provide some relief. At the very least a fresh chance for a few people ..."

He gave up. And when Karper spoke he didn't even mention the soaring idea Anthon had been trying to get across. He just said, "About those books of yours, young man. Where did you say you found them?"

Anthon sighed impatiently. "One of the new energy-and-food complexes in Kaliforn," he repeated. "I already told you, I was supervising a construction group tearing up a historical preserve to make room. We were in an old burial region and we hit an unusually large, elaborate tomb. Some rich Twenty-first Century eccentric or something; I don't know. But it contained a lot of relics of the age—including books and papers. Our machines broke an outer chamber and we found the ones I told you about. There may be more. But the rest of the vault is stronger. We'll need special equipment to open it without damaging any other artifacts that may—"

"And you came straight to me to ask for this special help," Karper interrupted, "rather than going to your immediate supervisor?"

"Yes. The issue seemed too important—"

"Hm-m-m! Proper channels are provided to be properly gone through, young man. Your supervisor can hardly be expected to like your bypassing him. I don't like it either. And I don't know *how* you bluffed and bullied your way past my secretaries." He paused, shaking his head and meditatively chewing a fingernail. "You thought it was too important," he repeated finally. "Now how on Earth did you decide that?"

"As soon as I saw what the books were about—"

Karper's eyebrows shot up in mock astonishment. "And how did you do that? You read Ancient English?"

"I told you," Anthon snapped, increasingly tired of repeating himself in circles, "I showed them to a friend. A professor of Ancient English in a Government School—"

"Who?"

"Mylo Gotfry. I told you that, too." Anthon suddenly felt—for the first time—an unaccustomed qualm. Had it been wise, he wondered, to mention Gotfry's name?

"Odd," Karper mused, again chewing his fingernail, "that a construction worker should be so friendly with a scholar. Can you explain that to me?"

"I can," Anthon said, his exasperation rising dangerously, "but what difference does it make? You keep harping on these petty things about me and ignoring what I came about. There's a pile of lost knowledge preserved out there and I want to be sure we get it out safely. Don't you care at all about

that? Wouldn't you even like to find out if the stars *might* offer some kind of a way out?"

"Frankly," Karper muttered with obvious irritation, "I think this whole notion of other suns and planets is hogwash—and that goes double for the idea of people going to such places. But—" Abruptly his manner became suave, ingratiating . . . patronizing. Making quite a show of it, he produced a writing pad on which Anthon saw but could not quite read a couple of scrawled words, and prepared to write some more. "If it will make you feel better, why don't you tell me exactly how to find this vault of yours, and I'll see that proper action is taken."

Anthon stared distastefully at the director's face for a long time, feeling a growing—and frightening—realization that "proper action" was not what he wanted. "Forget it," he said curtly, and as he said the words he rose from the chair, not allowing himself time to reconsider, and strode hastily from the room.

"Well, can you beat that!" Karper blinked in astonishment as Anthon Hillar's back disappeared through the door on his phonescreen.

"Do you want me to have him stopped before he leaves the building?" his secretary asked, reaching for call buttons.

"No." Karper shook his head absently. "The man's a crackpot, obviously. Not worth any more of our time." But as the secretary left and Karper tried to get back to what he had been doing before the interruption, his thoughts kept returning to the strange young construction worker. There were things about his story ...

Karper couldn't be sure, of course. Such things were not included in his training. But the wild ideas Hillar claimed to have unearthed sounded vaguely subversive. It obviously would not do to have rumors spreading that there was a way out—when, of course, there wasn't.

And if, by any farfetched chance, there actually *was* anything to the ideas ... if, impossible as it seemed, there *was* a way out—

In either case, Hillar should be in custody, and his vault should be found and opened under strictest security. And that scholar—Gotfrywho had already seen some of the books ...

Softly cursing his blunder in letting Hillar walk away so easily, Karper hurriedly punched buttons on his phonescreen and waited for a connection. When an image finally formed on the screen, he saluted it quickly and said, "Sir, something's come up and I need your advice. The man left my office just minutes ago and he can't have gone far . . ."

Karper was quite right that Anthon had not, at that moment, gone far—in terms of distance. But it took little time or effort for a man to effectively lose himself in the city's throngs.

And that was exactly what Anthon intended to do.

He had no plans yet. His decision had come suddenly and surprised him as much as Karper, and he had not yet considered what he would do next. It had just suddenly seemed clear that the ideas from the tomb were more likely to be reburied than revived by Karper and his fellow bureaucrats. And Anthon felt that they were much too important for that.

So he had left. Unceremoniously, but probably not in such a way as to prompt any immediate punitive action.

Still, there was no point in taking unnecessary risks. So as soon as he left the government building, he merged into the dense crowd jamming the street and threaded a zigzag course away from the building, moving fast but trying to avoid an appearance of suspicious haste. Blending in was easy—the crowd contained such a multitude of so many nondescript types that it was hard to follow any individual through it for long.

Not far away, the crowd thinned somewhat and the broad boulevard splintered into narrow streets penetrating the deep, dingy canyons of a residential district. Here Anthon felt slightly more conspicuous. Every few steps, beggars held their cups out and stared pointedly at him. He hurried on past them, past the thin hungry people who were everywhere, past the shabby rows of crowded apartments where they lived and died and watched blaring television sets. The day was hot, even at its end, and air-conditioners

poured excess heat into the street all along both sides. Anthon felt uncomfortable here—crime was commonplace, and the drugged and sick and mendicant had all become more numerous even within his own memory. And why not? Every man, woman, and child received a "fair share" of food and energy—but every year the fair share was a little smaller. Naturally more people would try to supplement theirs—or give up.

And when Anthon thought of Olaf Karper's round ruddy face and plush office against this background, he smelled a rat in the rationing process.

He was shaking as he reached the East 367th Street transport exchange and hurried down the ramp to the tunnels. The crowd circulated here, too, jostling for space on the moving standee strips of the intracity group and the enclosed trains of the Express system. Small private vehicles whizzed by in the Open lanes, and beggars sat cross-legged in reserved places along the walls. Anthon fought his way to a Seaward Express platform and got onto the second train. There were no seats, so he stood, gripping an overhead rail, as the train lurched forward into the dark tube. Looking straight ahead, he thought dazedly, *All Earth is like this! And it wasn't always ...*

The train hummed quietly for a few minutes, then lurched to a stop and waited as its passengers streamed to the exits. Anthon streamed with them, across the platform interchange and up to street level.

The smell of the sea was in the air here—though largely masked by the smells of the city—and things were a bit quieter. Anthon relaxed slightly. He was miles from Karper's office now, and almost certainly free of pursuers—unless Karper had taken his story much more to heart than Anthon believed likely. That meant he could now begin giving some real thought to his own actions.

He entered the continuous row of buildings that hid the beach from the street. There would be food dispensers and tables off a lobby, and it would be easier to think on a less empty stomach.

He found the machines with little effort. The room was half empty, and over the general chatter Anthon easily heard an enraged patrolman in the corner lecturing an embarrassed ten-year-old on how he must never, *ever* throw glass in the aluminum slot on the recycling terminal. But it barely registered on his mind—he had heard it before, and the offense was one he would never think of committing himself. He stuck his ration plate in a food dispenser, made his selection, and let his mind settle onto his own affairs.

He stood alone at an empty table to eat his meal and ponder his situation. What had got into him, anyway? Fired by the ideas Mylo had found in the old books and papers, he had gone to Karper with grandiose but vague ideas of acting on them. True, he *had* bypassed his supervisor—but it had seemed necessary at the time.

And then the interview with Karper had proved so fruitless that he had impulsively walked out in the middle of it. A nearly unthinkable breach of etiquette, he realized now, and as such probably a mistake—but not a crime.

And for that reason he almost certainly had no cause to expect trouble from that quarter.

But now he faced decisions. His idea, when he left, had been that he might do something on his own.

A vague idea—just like the ones that had taken him to Karper in the first place. The words from the tomb—fragile paper books imperfectly preserved in the sealed darkness, loose sheets coated with clear plastic—had tickled his imagination with the idea that there were other worlds and men might reach them. But they had told him nothing of *how*. And he knew so little.

Frustrated, but determined not to be unnerved by it, he finished his meal and went to the rear of a lower level. A service corridor led him outside on the sea side of the building, and he sat down on the narrow seawall with his feet dangling high above the breaking surf. It was one of the few places he knew where he could find a semblance of solitude.

It was getting dark. The rows upon rows of window lights in the building at his back danced in constantly shifting reflections on the dark water that stretched to the horizon.

And above them, in the sky, other points of light twinkled from fixed locations—the stars, whatever they were. Anthon could see nearly a dozen, and the old book said there were really thousands that could be seen where there was no city glow. Anthon tried to picture that, and failed.

But if there were . . .

And there was the moon, now a bright crescent low in the west. The closest of all other worlds, according to the books, and a desolate place not fit for living.

Yet, if the plastic sheets did not lie, the ancients had *walked* there!

Looking at the sky and remembering what Mylo had read to him, Anthon felt the same excitement that had sent him to Karper welling up again. Exotic names haunted him.

Where *was* Cape Kendy?

Then he remembered how little he knew and the excitement collapsed in a limp heap. *I don't know where to begin*, he thought bluntly. *Face it. I might as well go back to work in the morning and forget all this. But it was a nice dream.*

He stood up abruptly, jerking his eyes away from the sky, and turned back to the door to the building, *Maybe*, he thought savagely, defensively, *those papers were just a hoax anyway ...*

He started inside—and stopped in midstride as a voice spoke inside his head. "No," it said quietly but distinctly and Anthon knew it was Laming from somewhere else, "they're no hoax."

Ozrlag looked up as soon as he had thought it and saw Mizhjar standing in the doorway, glaring sternly and flicking his forked tail from side to side. Flustered, trying to move his four-fingered paw as inconspicuously as possible, he shut off the transmitter and looked sheepishly at Mizhjar, waiting. "Hello," he said finally, weakly.

Mizhjar blinked his nictitating membranes indifferently. "Just what," he asked grimly, "do you think you were doing just now?"

"I .....Ozrlag began uncertainly.

"Never mind," Mizhjar interrupted, snapping his tail impatiently. "I know what you were doing. The question is *why?*" He strode toward Ozrlag, powerful muscles rippling under his soft pink down, and stood looking ominously down at his seated apprentice. "Don't you realize that people are *trying* to observe a culture in its natural state down there?"

"Yes, sir," Ozrlag gulped—or at least did what would correspond to gulping among the jomur. "But . . ." He had already started to recover from the shock of discovery by his adviser, and already he was preparing to attempt a defense. "This Anthon is special. We'd been studying this culture for seven seasons before we noticed him, and how far did we get? All we knew was that it was anomalous—a subsistence economy with a high-level technology. Nuclear power in full swing—though apparently frozen at the breeder reactor stage—and a vast population on the brink of starvation. Weird. Paradoxical. But *how did it get that way?* We had big teams scanning local archives through native minds and finding no clues. There seemed to be a big gap in their records, as if they had no interest in history. What Anthon found seems likely to start filling the gap."

"And we already have a group concentrating on what Anthon found," Mizhjar pointed out, "through Mylo Gotfry. You still haven't said anything to explain your arrogance in making a direct contact."

"Anthon thinks there's more where that came from," Ozrlag said. "He tried to get special help to get at it—because he's interested in the space-travel concept, which he seems never to have met before. Just now he was about to give up—and that would cost us access to this new information. So I thought it would be to our advantage to prod him a little." Ozrlag paused, looking expectantly at Mizhjar, then added defensively, "Look, I didn't give us away. I just made one little comment, as an anonymous mental voice. He could interpret it as his own conscience, or divine inspiration, or whatever's fashionable this season."

The expression on Mizhjar's feline face softened slightly, to Ozrlag's considerable relief. "I'll grant," he said, just a bit grudgingly, "that we'd all like to know what's in the other documents—if there *are* any other documents. But I'm still not sure you chose the wisest way to try to get at them. And look here." He motioned vaguely at the monitor panel—a panel which, like most on board the orbiting ship, would have struck a human visitor as oddly blank. But that was simply because most of the instrument readouts were directly telepathic, and Mizhjar's apparently random gesture directed Ozrlag unerringly to the intended item. "This ruler type that Anthon went to—Karper—is *not* going to help him help us. But it looks like Anthon's request unsettled him quite a bit, and the government's going to go after whatever

other documents there are on its own."

Ozrlag hadn't noticed that before, but it was obvious now. Less obvious were the reasons. He started to comment, but before he started, Mizhjar continued.

"Just what they intend isn't clear—anyway to me. I don't think they're sure themselves, yet. But there's a good possibility that they'll destroy that material, or at least impound it, rather than trying to read it. So it behooves us to get there first—with somebody who wants to read it."

"Anthon?" Ozrlag asked, startled.

Mizhjar nodded. "Yes. And he might be reluctant, in his present mood."

"So," Ozrlag said slowly, hardly believing Mizhjar had come around to this in these few minutes, "I can keep talking to him?"

"I'm afraid you'll have to," Mizhjar said with obvious reluctance. "But, please . . . try to be discreet."

Anthon's first reaction to the voice in his head was puzzlement—and a bit of concern for his own mental health, since he had never been subject to hallucinations. He paused, just outside the door, and listened intently. But all he heard was the sea pounding the wall behind him, and the soft hum of the building's service machinery.

He shrugged and entered the building, shoving the imagined voice into the back of his mind. Resigned to the futility of what he had hoped to do, he headed back toward the street and the transport exchange. He would go home and count this day lost; tomorrow he would return to his job, take whatever minor punishment was coming to him, and then live out his days as he had always expected to.

The train was purring through its black tunnel, its few passengers reflected brightly in the small windows, when Anthon heard the silent voice again. "Giving up?" it chided gently. "With so much at stake? A fresh chance, and you pass it up?"

It was too distinct to ignore. Anthon grudgingly acknowledged its reality and tried to think rationally about it. Either it was a trick his own mind was playing on him, or *somebody* was somehow communicating directly with him. Anthon had heard folk tales of such communication. He had never believed them, but he was not one to dismiss possibilities without even a cursory examination.

He glanced around to make sure no other passengers were close. Then he whispered, "Who are you?"

He listened—if that is the right word. But no answer came.

Several seconds passed with no sound but the hum of the train and faint laughter from the far end of the car.

Then the "voice" came again, cool and with no indication of having heard Anthon's question. "The stars, Anthon, the stars!" it said. "Are you going to let them slip through your fingers? Aren't you going to *try* to get **the** other documents from the tomb?"

"The stars," Anthon muttered, quoting Karper, "are hogwash."

"No, Anthon," the voice insisted. "The stars are real. And they have new worlds—"

"How do *you* know?" Anthon snapped.

No answer.

Anthon waited. Then, "Whoever you are—can you hear me?"

Silence. Just the hum of the train. Anthon shrugged. *O. K.*, he thought, annoyed. *So maybe I don't know how to talk back so he can hear me. Or maybe it is just a hallucination.*

Either way, he didn't like it.

The train screeched into the exchange nearest his home and he got off. Without further delay, the train streaked noisily out of sight while Anthon crossed the platform interchange—cautiously, for transport exchanges attracted thugs at night—and caught a lift to his street.

The street, like most residential, was a narrow canyon between high-row dwellings, still sweltering in the exhaust of a thousand air-conditioners even this late at night. A few bright stars hung in the narrow slice of sky between roof fronts and shimmered in the turbulent air.

And Anthon felt haunted. He no longer heard the voice—although occasionally he seemed to catch a wisp of something so faint he couldn't be sure it was real—but the questions it had raised were again

churning in his mind. He had thought the issue was closed—and now, whether the voice was real or imagined, it was tormenting him again.

*Suppose, he thought, the stars are real. Then you are throwing something big away. Can you do that and live with yourself?*

*What can I do?* another part of his mind countered. *I don't know where to begin.*

*You begin,* came the reply—and Anthon wondered idly if this dialogue was all in his own mind or if that voice was actually helping—*with the tomb. All the documents*—And suddenly Anthon's mind pulled together into a unit again as he realized the magnitude of what he had just thought. Of course that was the place to begin! His attempt to get at whatever was still in the tomb had failed—but they had barely scratched the surface of what Mylo already had. Possibly *that* contained a key.

For a fleeting instant, Anthon wondered about the tomb itself. While he had heard of such elaborate burials before, with artifacts preserved along with the body, he knew they were not usual in any part of the Twenty-first Century. What sort of man had had himself buried so oddly, with a library he could never read again—and why?

Had he, Anthon wondered abruptly, been trying to tell those who followed him something?

Then the thought passed and Anthon filled with new determination. He paused at the door of his own apartment and turned his new plan over once in his mind, examining it. He would go back to Mylo and learn all he could from the documents already in hand. And then, armed with that knowledge, he could better seek whatever else he needed to restore the lost arts.

*Maybe, he thought jauntily as he turned away from his unopened door and started back to the street, I'll even go find Cape Kendy myself!*

Ozrlag saw Anthon's decision and swore—and among the jOmiir, profanity is a highly developed and highly regarded art form. Reluctantly, he summoned Mizhjar.

Mizhjar's first words, when he arrived, were, "*Now* what have you done?"

"Please!" Ozrlag winced. "Must you always assume I've botched something? It's just that ... well, my attempts to goad Anthon into going back after whatever documents are still in that tomb aren't working quite according to plan. I've got him interested in space travel again—but now he fancies himself as some sort of savior of his people." Mizhjar's whiskers curled questioningly and Ozrlag explained, "That is, he sees space travel as a way out of their domestic problems, and since the government doesn't seem interested, he wants to learn about it himself. He's going back to Mylo Gotfry to get started."

"Ridiculous!" Mizhjar snarled.

"Of course," Ozrlag agreed. "But even more importantly, a wasteful duplication of effort. We already have historians and comparative scientists scanning that material through Gotfry. Anthon isn't going to do a thing for us there. And meanwhile he's doing nothing to keep Karper from grabbing whatever new stuff there is out from under our noses."

Mizhjar nodded slightly. "What are you leading up to, Ozrlag?"

"I tried to obey your instructions to be discreet," said Ozrlag, "and this is where it got me. I couldn't be explicit enough. All I could do was prod him to follow his own inclinations—and they led him in a direction just different enough from what we had in mind to be utterly useless to us. Considering the possible importance of new documents to our cultural studies, I wondered if you would consider it wise to let him in on a little secret. If he knew who we are and what we want, and saw the possibility of mutual benefit—"

"*No!*" Mizhjar's tufted ears snapped erect and he broke in without waiting for Ozrlag to finish. He was obviously not at all amused. "That sort of thing is *strictly* a last resort. I can imagine circumstances in which you'd have no choice—but things haven't got that bad yet. Keep the same kind of pressure you have been using, but slant it to getting at the new information before it's lost. You can do that, can't you? Play on this obsession of his. Use it to our advantage. And don't disillusion him too soon. You understand?"

Ozrlag, approximately speaking, sighed. "Yes, sir. I'll do my best."

Mylo Gotfry now lived, as befitted one entrusted with the education of future government officials, in a well-appointed penthouse among the foothills two hundred miles from Anthon's home. It was midday when Anthon stepped off the last strip and looked quickly around, less to marvel at the tiered expanse of rooftops stretching down into the valley and up the neighboring hills than to detect any signs of possible personal danger. It felt rather silly, almost paranoid—but the fact was that he had now been away from work without authorization for several hours, and that sort of thing simply isn't done. He *would* be hunted, and though he was far from home, Karper knew of his association with Mylo. He did not dare feel safe here.

Feeling a completely unaccustomed apprehensiveness—he had never been a fugitive before—he entered the building. He scanned the door-lined corridor furtively from the end before entering it, and when a lift stopped for him he watched the door open from a hidden alcove across the hall to be sure the car was empty.

His tensest moment came when the lift discharged him into a glassed-in vestibule on the roof. There was virtually no cover here, Anthon realized uncomfortably—no place to hide if they happened to trace him here.

But they were not here now, and things improved slightly in the corridor that served all the rooftop apartments. It was all glassed in, like the vestibule where the lift came up, to give the tenants the illusion of being outside without the annoyance of being rained on. But the immediate neighborhoods of many of the apartments were decorated by artificial shrubbery to heighten the illusion—rather sparse, but better than nothing.

Breathing only a little easier, Anthon reached Mylo's door and stopped. He put his ear to the door, listening for voices other than Mylo's, but heard nothing.

He knocked.

As he waited, he mulled over his solidifying plans, feeling growing confidence. Sure, the other worlds were far away—that was obvious from their appearance as tiny spots in the sky. Of course they wouldn't be able to absorb enough people to relieve the crowding on Earth. But that crowding had grown so bad that increasing numbers found local conditions intolerable—and Anthon was sometimes plagued by doubts about how long such a civilization could survive at all. If it didn't—or even if it just remained as it was—it seemed increasingly desirable to give even a few people a chance to try again, to start fresh on an unspoiled world and avoid the mistakes of their ancestors.

Their ancestors had been on the way to achieving that possibility—and, apparently, had abandoned the attempt. Anthon had no idea why, but he had found a way to learn what they had known and try to build on it. His mistake had been going to Karper prematurely—before he had thought it out to the point where he could offer more than vague conjecture. But after he had studied the documents Mylo had here, he would be able to offer concrete suggestions. And Mylo was, in his way, a rather influential man

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Meanwhile, Mylo was also a clever man. Clever enough to help Anthon stay out of sight while he studied the old books and papers.

Anthon realized with a start that he had been standing here letting his thoughts wander for a long time, and Mylo had not answered. He knocked again.

Again a long silence. This time Anthon's thoughts focused on a question: What was wrong in there?

He didn't knock again. He stepped behind the artificial shrubs and stood under the window, small and set high in the wall to insure privacy while letting sunlight in. Hooking his hands over the narrow sill, he hauled himself up and rested his weight on his forearms while he looked inside.

Mylo was there, right across the room, but Anthon had never seen him like this before. He sat at a table, the ancient volumes piled before him, his bald head tilted toward Anthon and glistening with sweat. He didn't look up—his eyes never left the tattered volume he held open in front of him. He was flipping through the pages, in order and quite methodically, but so fast that he couldn't possibly be actually reading them.

With growing alarm, Anthon rapped on the windowpane.

Mylo didn't even look up. He kept flipping through the pages as if he had not heard Anthon.

Anthon dropped to the roof. Something was very wrong—and very strange—with Mylo. And Anthon wasn't at all sure what he should try to do about it. Should he break in—or leave as fast as he could?

He was about to decide on breaking in when that "voice" returned, and this time there was a commanding sense of urgency in it. *"Anthon! Hide—right now!"*

The tone was so compelling that Anthon was stretched flat on the roof, between the wall and the shrubs, before he even thought of questioning it. And then when he started to think about what he had done, he heard footsteps coming up the corridor from the lift.

He froze, waiting, breathing as lightly as he could. The footsteps passed right by him, separated from him only by the thin plastic plants, and then he saw four male feet turn and stop at Mylo's door. Lying very still, he rolled his eyes upward. He could see their faces now, and if they happened to look this way they would see him, too.

One of them was Olaf Karper. The other Anthon didn't recognize, but he was tall and rugged, with a craggy face and brilliant red hair, and he wore a government suit.

Karper knocked on Mylo's door. He and the stranger waited silently for half a minute, then he knocked again.

This time a full minute passed. Then Karper looked up at the stranger and said, "He doesn't answer, sir. I have no idea why he should suspect anything—unless Hillar came here and warned him. Do I have your permission to break the door down?"

Anthon frowned—or would have, had he dared to allow himself that luxury. Karper made it sound as if they were looking for Mylo, instead of Anthon.

The stranger nodded. "Go ahead, Olaf."

Karper drew back a step from the door and took a small metal instrument from a deep pocket. He made an adjustment on it, then pointed it at the lock and seemed to brace himself.

At the anticlimactic sound of a latch turning inside, Karper lowered his instrument. Anthon heard the door open and Mylo appeared, looking pale, dazed, and disoriented. "What is it?" he asked, his voice weak and tired. Anthon felt slightly relieved, but there was still much that needed explaining.

The tall redhead flashed a card at Mylo. "Mylo Gotfry? Artu Landen, Senior Security. You know a chap named Anthon Hillar?"

Mylo frowned slightly. He looked as if he were gradually getting his bearings back. "I do," he said. "Why?"

"He brought you some books—old books, to translate. We want those."

"I don't understand! They're just—"

"Don't argue. They're suspected of conflict with the people's interest. Here's my warrant. Now, the books, please."

Mylo read the warrant carefully, slowly, then turned without a word and disappeared into the apartment, leaving the door open. He reappeared shortly, carrying the pile from the table.

Security Officer Landen looked at them. "Old, all right," he muttered. "Are these all?"

"Yes." Mylo added no title of respect.

Landen hesitated briefly, then nodded to Karper. "Better make sure he didn't forget any, Olaf." Karper squeezed through the door past Mylo. While he waited, Landen lifted a book off the top and thumbed curiously through it, shaking his head. Then he took several books off the pile and tucked them under his arm.

Karper came back out and reported, "That seems to be all of them, sir."

Landen smiled slightly and nodded at the books Mylo still held. "Good. Get the rest, will you, Olaf?" Then, to Mylo, "Gotfry, you know as well as I that this sort of work is to be done only under official supervision. I won't take any action against you this time, but I'd advise you to steer clear of unauthorized moonlighting in the future." He turned without waiting for an answer and started briskly back to the lift, closely followed by Karper and the rest of the books.



Mylo looked after them for no more than a second, then turned, looking vaguely puzzled, and went back inside and shut the door. Anthon lay still, waiting to be sure Landen and Karper were really gone, and tried to make sense out of what had just happened. They hadn't been interested in Mylo after all, it seemed. Apparently they weren't even very concerned about Anthon. Instead, they wanted the books—and Artu Landen was Senior Security! Why would anybody that high suddenly care about those books—while ignoring a construction supervisor absent without leave?

After what seemed a reasonable time, Anthon cautiously stuck his head out between the shrubs and looked down toward the lift. It looked safe. He stood up and started toward Mylo's door.

"No," said the voice in his head.

Anthon hesitated, frowning and thinking rapidly. Too much was going on that he didn't understand. In particular, he was getting tired of being kept in the dark by whoever was behind that "voice."

"Why not?" he thought, and when no answer came he took another step forward.

"Don't," said the voice.

Anthon stopped again, but not indecisively. He was pretty sure now that, if the voice was actually coming from outside, its owner *could* read his thoughts. Its remarks were always too well timed for coincidence. In fact, thinking back, he remembered one point in last night's exchange on the train when the voice had seemed to slip and answer him directly. So he should be able to bargain. "You don't seem to want me to know who you are," he thought pointedly, "but you also don't want me to talk to Mylo. I'd like some information from you. Will you answer some questions—or shall I knock?" He lifted his hand toward the door.

He felt an odd throbbing in his brain, a sort of sub-verbal command to wait. Then that faded and the voice said, with obvious reluctance, "What do you want to know?"

"So," Anthon smiled slightly, lowering his hand, "you *can* read me. I thought so. Let's begin with the obvious. Who are you?"

No words formed, but Anthon "felt" the owner of the voice frantically seeking a way to avoid answering. "You've been needling me with the idea that the stars and their planets are real," he prompted, "as if you're certain of it. You've *experienced* interstellar travel?"

Pause. Then, quietly, "Yes."

"You're *from* one of those other worlds?"

"Yes."

A slight, remote hope rose. "Are you human?"

"That's a hard word to define," the voice said wryly. "In some senses, we would say yes. But we aren't of your kind."

Anthon had suspected that. He thought of the odd state he had found Mylo in before Landen and Karper had come. The idea of a connection was hard to escape. He asked bluntly, "What were you doing to Mylo Gotfry a few minutes ago?"

Another pause as the voice—Ozrlag, Anthon knew suddenly, without knowing how—tried to hedge and again found itself trapped. "We are interested in the origins of your present culture, but most of the information about them seems to have been suppressed. So we were especially interested in the contents of the documents you found. We were having your friend read them for us—using his ability to translate the archaic language. When you arrived, we were having him go through them very rapidly, because we anticipated trouble from the government and we wanted to get as much as possible before it came."

Ozrlag seized the opportunity to change the subject, quickening the pace of his thoughts. "As you see, the trouble we anticipated has already come. And don't think it will stop here. We both wanted what was in those books, Anthon—you did and we did. Now neither of us may get it. But there may be more in the unopened compartments of that burial vault—the ones you tried to get Karper to help you open. You'd like to see it and we'd like to see it—and it's pretty obvious your government would also like to get their hands on it. Maybe we can stop them—but it will take speed and cooperation."

Anthon frowned. "Are you suggesting a deal?"

"Yes. Go back to the vault—tonight. Lead us to it, and . . . and we'll send someone from our expedition to meet you and help you open it."

"Where is your expedition?" Anthon asked suspiciously.

"Never mind that," Ozrlag thought curtly. "You be there—and so will we."

Anthon drew a deep breath. "I think," he replied coolly, "that you want it more than I do. I'll agree—but only if you agree to provide more in return than you've offered so far."

"Such as?"

"Such as this." Anthon paused to compose his thoughts before beginning the proposition which had suddenly occurred to him. "There's no certainty that I'll be able to learn all I need to know about space travel from the books in the tomb. But you have experience. You can give us advice. You can help us get started."

"That's a big order," Ozrlag said after a while. "I doubt that you realize how big."

"No matter." Anthon was firm. "That's what I expect in return. If you want my help—take it or leave it."

A long pause—and, it seemed to Anthon—although he couldn't say why—a troubled pause. And then Ozrlag answered with similar firmness, "We'll tell you what we can—but only *after* you've led us to the vault."

Anthon thought it over. He seemed to have no more bargaining points. And the recent actions of Karper and Landen suggested strongly that getting to the vault first was a matter of some urgency.

He nodded slightly. "Agreed." Ozrlag shut off the transmitter and turned away from it with an emphatic, *Whew! Well, it's happened. Hope Mizhjar believes it.* The realization of the turn events had taken, and what he had got himself into in terms of promises, was a little awesome. *But*, as he reminded himself quite truthfully, *there's no point in worrying much over that ...*

He got on the interphone to Amzhraz, the head of the research group that had been working through Gotfry. "Evidently you know your books were confiscated," he said without preamble. "Did you get anything you can use?"

Amzhraz made a modified affirmative gesture—disappointed, but not completely frustrated. "Yes, by pushing him. We'll try to keep track of the books, but we can't make just anybody read them for us. The language problem, you know. But we got enough to piece together quite an interesting picture. Look at this." He held a compact summary up to the phone.

Ozrlag glanced at it and his whiskers writhed in puzzlement. "Interesting," he agreed, "to put it mildly. I'm afraid I don't have time to study it right now, but I certainly will." He broke the connection, braced himself, and called Mizhjar.

"You did *what*?" Mizhjar rasped, drawing his lips tight against his teeth, when Ozrlag had finished summarizing.

"I admitted we were from off-planet," Ozrlag repeated quietly, forcing himself to remain calm, "and interested in their culture. And I ... er . . . said we would send one of us to help him open the rest of that tomb."

Mizhjar struggled silently with his temper. Then he said tightly, "Ozrlag, you'd be a lot easier to take if you weren't so impulsive. What made you do a fool thing like that?"

"You said yourself," Ozrlag reminded, "that you could imagine circumstances where I would have no choice. They seemed to have arrived. Anthon—and the others—had me in a corner."

"I also said that anything like this was strictly a last resort, and I think you were too hasty—as usual—in deciding a last resort was called for. A moment's thought ..." He broke off, radiating exasperation. "Exactly what pressure did Anthon put on you?"

Ozrlag cringed slightly. "He was suspicious and about to barge in on Mylo Gotfry when he had just been reading for us. I tried to stop him, but he threatened to go ahead unless I'd answer some questions. I was afraid if he talked to Gotfry right then he'd find out—"

"So you *told* him more than he would have learned from Gotfry! *Think* about what you did, Ozrlag!

What did you accomplish? You just blundered in and . . ."

"He would have learned some of it anyway," Ozrlag interrupted hotly, "and then his curiosity would have driven him after the rest. I'm not convinced that I really made things worse than they would have been anyway. And meanwhile Karper had brought another ruler and they confiscated the books Gotfry had been reading. They'll be hunting for the others, too, since they know about the tomb. Anthon's probably our only chance to get at them first. He's actually serious about this thing, Mizhjar. And since he was going to know at least something about us anyway, sending somebody down cautiously at night didn't seem so—"

Mizhjar was twisting his tail in slow, ominous patterns. "You've got a glib tongue, Ozrlag," he said carefully. "But you still need some judgment to go with it. Your argument has a bit of merit—just a bit. And enough damage is already done that we might as well go through with it, just in case there really is something important still in that vault. But who should go? It'll be a touchy job. So far only Anthon knows about us Gotfry has some inkling, but he doesn't understand—but whoever goes down to the surface risks discovery by others. He'll be after valuable information for our cultural studies—but at the risk of jeopardizing the continuation of those studies at any level. And at considerable personal risk." He looked straight at Ozrlag, his expression stony. "Since this was your bright idea, I think *you* should be the one to go."

"Me?" Ozrlag yelped.

"You," Mizhjar said with finality. "I think you may learn something from it. Since so much depends on your not making an ass of yourself, I suggest you get over to Amzhraz and start briefing yourself. And when you go down there—you'd better be careful."

"But . . ." Ozrlag started to protest and then broke off. The phone-screen had already gone blank.

Very briefly, he felt almost panic-stricken. Then, as he watched the afterimage fade away, he smiled to himself.

He had thought of another project.

To avoid the risk of unintended further damage to the tomb in which the books had been found, Anthon had transferred his crew's operations to another area before visiting Karper. He had even had the foresight to avoid making any fuss over that site, or giving the men any indication that it was the reason for suddenly moving their work elsewhere. Thus now, as he picked his way across the mutilated ground with no light but that of the moon, stars, and skyglow, he did not really expect to meet anybody. But his nerves and senses were tuned to a high pitch because of things that *could* happen—and in anticipation of meeting a traveler from the stars. He wasn't even sure, after the conversation he had heard between Landen and Karper, if they were looking for him. But he was sure he didn't want to be apprehended now. He had bigger things to do.

The air was getting slightly chilly and Anthon was very conscious of the smell of recently turned damp earth. And then he "heard" Ozrlag: "Anthon . . . you're nearly there? Don't answer out loud."

"Yes," Anthon said silently. "You're alone?"

"I think so." Ozrlag must have known that—unless his mind-reading abilities were limited and he needed to check them against perceptions of Anthon's which he could not see directly.

"Good. Stop where you are. I'll join you in a minute." Anthon stopped, anxiously scanning the darkness around him for his first glimpse of an extraterrestrial. He tried to imagine what Ozrlag would look like, and, of course, how he would be traveling ...

He wasn't sure exactly when he first caught sight of him. He just knew, after a while, that an indistinct shape had detached itself from the darkness and was moving toward him across the ground, perhaps a dozen yards away, eyes glowing faint yellow. As Ozrlag came closer, Anthon saw that he was walking upright on two legs and waving a long tail behind him, looking uncannily like a large cat modified for an erect posture and standing about four feet tall. But his slit pupils were horizontal, his tail was forked, he had a fine fuzzy covering instead of long fur, and fingers instead of paws—and he was wearing simple clothes and carrying a hexagonal suitcase-like thing in one hand. Anthon felt an unaccustomed excitement as the alien strode up, stopped three feet in front of him, and looked up at his face. But he saw no

evidence that Ozrlag felt any similar emotion at meeting him.

"And so we meet," said Ozrlag but he said it silently, the same way he had said everything so far. Anthon felt vaguely disappointed not to hear his actual voice, but he could easily see good reasons. Ozrlag continued briskly, "Nobody else is to know of my visit. Nobody. You understand that?"

Anthon nodded. "I understand." "How great is the danger of our being discovered? Take me to the tomb while you answer."

Anthon started walking. "I don't know. I've been away, and I'm not sure what Karper and Landen—and my boss—are after. My guess is that they want to confiscate and suppress whatever's in the tomb—although I don't know why. But, if they're really interested, they'll be able to find the vault easily enough. I never told my boss exactly where it is, but he knows roughly where I was working right before I went to Karper. So if they asked him, he could help them narrow their search quite a bit."

Ozrlag was keeping pace with Anthon's long strides with no apparent effort. "I was afraid of that," he thought. "We'll just have to hope we get there and get what we want before they do." Anthon tried to interpret the emotional tone he seemed to sense with the words. He had an impression that Ozrlag was quite nervous about something, but he couldn't tell what—or even if that were actually the right interpretation.

They reached the vault. It sat, partly uncovered and surrounded by a thin moat of muddy water, at the bottom of a depression made by earthmovers. The region was full of such depressions, many of them containing ruins or monuments, but few of the other structures were quite *as* large or quite as substantial as this one. Still, the difference was not so obvious as to automatically attract the attention of any casual passerby.

Anthon and Ozrlag warily circled the rim of the depression, looking for signs of present, or recent activity around the tomb. Seeing none, Anthon nodded and started down the slope. Ozrlag scurried on ahead and began opening his suitcase.

And a light appeared from no where, swept over the depression, and it locked on Anthon. "Hold it right there!" a voice barked. "Security check!"

Anthon stopped where he was, with a sinking feeling. Ozrlag was already down, but his chances of escaping discovery were slight. And the blinding light remained fixed on Anthon's face as the person wielding it trotted closer. For an instant he toyed with the idea of trying to run, but then the watchman came close enough so Anthon could see that the lantern was attached to the barrel of a decidedly ugly handgun. Anthon stood very still.

As the watchman drew up in front of him, he stuck a walkie-talkie back into its holster and lowered the lantern just enough to make it a shade less unpleasant. "It's you, all right!" the watchman declared triumphantly, grinning and showing several gaps in his teeth. "They thought you'd come back here. You just stand right there, son. They'll be along in a jiffy."

Anthon stood—being held at gunpoint provided undeniable incentive. The watchman kept glancing around nervously, as if looking for something, but he never took the light—and gun—off Anthon.

"They" came within two minutes. A supervisor's cart whirred across the ground, bounced to a halt ten feet away, and Karper and Landen jumped out opposite sides of it. "That's the one," Karper said with obvious satisfaction. "And I'd guess this must be the place. Thought he might lead us to it."

"There was someone else with him, sir," the watchman said. "But I didn't get a good look and I don't know where he went. Do I still need to keep this one covered?"

"No," Landen answered. "He's under control. Look for the other one."

The watchman took the lantern off Anthon and swept the area with it, first around the rim and then down in the depression. Finding nothing, he started around the rim, keeping the light aimed down at the tomb. Suddenly he stopped. "Something moved down there," he whispered. He took a sudden quick step, there was a flurry of movement in the depression, and then Ozrlag was caught in the beam, his back against the tomb and staring up as if the light had him pinned there. It was the first light bright enough to show colors since he had met Anthon.

Landen swore softly. "What on Earth is *that*?"

Karper blinked and shook his head. "A giant pink pussycat?" he giggled nervously.

"Shall I shoot it?" the watchman asked. He sounded eager.

"No," Landen answered at once. "But stay ready." He turned to Anthon. "What do you know about that thing down there, Hillar?"

"That's Ozrlag," Anthon said, distorting the jomur sounds slightly to fit his mouth. He looked squarely at Karper. "He's from one of those other planets you called hogwash. He came down to help me open the rest of the vault and get out whatever other books are there. Because"—and here he sped up as if to hurry past things which were dangerous but had to be said—"I didn't want you to get hold of those like you got the first batch. I don't understand why you want to suppress the idea of space travel, but it isn't going to work. Because even if you get these books too, Ozrlag's people are here and they know all about space travel and they're going to tell us!"

Karper's shock at the tirade was obvious and not surprising, but it was Landen who answered. "Why do you assume we want to suppress it, Anthon?" he asked quietly.

Now Anthon was taken by surprise. "Don't you?" he asked.

"It was a possibility," Landen admitted, "but only as a last resort. Look . . . we know the state the world's in, too. It's discouraging. People—a lot of people—would jump at the chance to go somewhere else. *If* the chance existed, there'd be fierce competition for the available spots. We might have to play it down to avoid new domestic troubles. We'd *certainly* have troubles if word spread that there was a way out when there really wasn't. So if this space travel idea turned out to be just a myth—yes, we'd suppress it. But if it actually held water, we'd want to learn to use it. So before anything else, we wanted to find out." He glanced down at Ozrlag. "Your friend here throws a whole new light on things. How can I talk to him?"

"Just talk," Anthon said. "Or even just think without talking. I don't know how it works, but he'll understand you."

Landen looked down at Ozrlag and tried to affect a friendly smile. "So," he said, "you folks can tell us about interstellar travel, eh? Well, we'll be *delighted* to hear what you have to say!"

Ozrlag seemed, somehow, to shrink from them, and his "voice" spoke to all of them. "No," it said very quietly, "you won't. I hate to disappoint all of you, but what you want to do ... you can't."

Something in Anthon tensed. "Are you trying to say," he asked, completely confused, "that interstellar travel is impossible after all?"

"I'm saying," Ozrlag returned slowly, "that for *you* it is impossible."

Landen and Karper glanced at each other. Anthon fought to keep his mind steady and absorb what Ozrlag was saying. "What do you mean?" he asked tightly.

"Your ancestors played you a dirty trick," said Ozrlag. "Anthon ... you, at least, knew we were reading the first batch of documents you found here by using Mylo Gotfry as an intermediary. You knew he was going fast. Our researchers have absorbed far more from those documents than you have—enough so that now have a pretty good idea of how your world got the way it is."

"Come to the point!" Landen snapped.

"As soon as I can," Ozrlag replied, *I* using to hurry. "You won't understand it without the background. Not long before this tomb was built—during the lifetime of the man buried here—some of your ancestors took the first small steps into space—the first small steps away from confinement to the home world. They reached your moon; they sent a few instruments to other planets of this system. And then they stopped.

"Why did they stop? Because of public pressure to use the resources that were being used in space on domestic problems instead . . . things like pollution and overpopulation and poverty. Poverty turned out to be the one that got the most demand, and the governments gave it. They tried to end it with handouts. It didn't really work, of course, any more than it's ever worked for anybody else. But it gave a comforting illusion for a while—especially since population was at such a level that to implement the poverty program they were incidentally forced to solve some of the pollution and energy problems. They had to continue developing their technology far enough to get breeder reactors into routine use for power generation—but after that they let innovation die out. And the breederization and ecology readjustment

programs increased their capacity for feeding people so drastically that they could quit worrying about overpopulation. They wouldn't strain their new capacities for a long time—and given the choice of a real effort to curb population growth, or a way of absorbing more children, they overwhelmingly opted to absorb more people.

"But, of course, eventually the population did catch up again—and things deteriorated to what you have now. A culture with nuclear power driving television sets and air-conditioners—anyway until the fuel runs out, as it surely will—and so many people they all have a full-time struggle to get enough to eat. And no way out."

Anthon felt himself starting to shake with emotion. His dream was crumbling. "No way out?" he echoed. "The stars—"

"You can't get there from here," Ozrlag said harshly. "You *could* have—if they'd continued their efforts from the start. But they chose to stop space travel and let population growth continue unchecked; they should have done just the opposite, on both counts. I said going to the Moon was a small first step. I meant it. It was a tremendously impressive undertaking at the time, but you can hardly conceive how much more difficult it is to reach the stars. It can be done—but only with many, many man-years of dedicated work once you've passed the Moon-rocket stage. But *you* won't even be able to get that far, now—because it would require a kind of education and research that your static culture hasn't had for centuries, and it would require great amounts of manpower and material. And a subsistence economy can't spare manpower and material for anything except keeping itself alive."

"But," Karper protested, "if you already know the techniques and can teach us—"

"It still won't work," Ozrlag interrupted bluntly. "Even if we provided all the teachers gratis—which is a bit much to expect—you simply can't spare the students. Try to realize, we're talking about *massive* education and construction projects, even for as small a problem as going to the Moon. *Even if we try to help you*, you're trapped. I'm sorry." He looked pensively at the tomb. "I think the man who was buried here was upset at the space programs being killed at that crucial time. I think he saw, at least dimly, why it was wrong, and preserved his books in the hope they would help somebody get started again later. He didn't realize that his message would arrive too late to help."

Anthon stared numbly into space at the wreckage of his idea. He distantly heard Landen saying, "But there are more direct kinds of aid. You people have starships already, and there must be something we could provide in exchange." He paused, then blurted out, "And if coercion is necessary, we have you as a hostage."

It sounded futile to Anthon, but then he noticed that Ozrlag unmistakably grinned at Landen's suggestion. "Well," the jomur said, doubt that I'm a very *valuable* hostage, at the moment, but I'll see what can be arranged."

And at those words Anthon felt a thin thread of hope still alive within him.

## EPILOGUE

Anthon paused in the door of the jomur ship to survey his new home before becoming the first man to set foot on it. Never before had he seen such a wealth of growing plants as those which carpeted the hills rolling off to the horizon, or a sky like the one he saw now, utterly clear and deep blue except for a bank of billowy white clouds in the west. Never had he heard such a chorus of smaller living things, or felt such refreshing breezes.

Full of exhilaration at his role as chosen leader of the new colony, he shouldered his ax and gun and strode down the gangway onto the soft grass. He waited and watched proudly as the other men, women, and children followed him onto their new world. In five minutes they were all there, waiting, as Ozrlag came down alone to say good-bye.

"Terrific!" Anthon laughed as Ozrlag approached. "A new beginning—thanks to you. How many people will you be transplanting altogether, and how long will it take?"

"Hm-m-m?" Ozrlag's surprise at the question was unmistakable. "This is all, as far as I know."

"Anthon's jaw dropped. He hadn't been in on arranging the details himself, of course, but he'd been

led to believe ... "I thought—" he began.

"I thought we'd been over all this," Orzlag interrupted, hardly listening. "Earth couldn't possibly offer us anything to finance a lot of these super-ferry trips, now, could it? And even if we wanted, obviously we couldn't make enough to make a dent in the population. But when we found out you and some others were interested in trying to make a better go of it elsewhere . . . well, it was easy to arrange for one small group, and it fit right in with a project I'd thought of for my apprenticeship—"

"Apprenticeship?" Anthon echoed.

"Yes. I thought you knew. I'm an apprentice sociologist and I thought a good topic for an experimental study would be the efforts of intelligent beings transplanted from a place like Earth to get along on a fresh world—"

"Ozrlag!"

The call broke in sharply, its tone peremptory. Mizhjar had appeared at the top of the gangway and was insistently beckoning for Ozrlag to return.

Ozrlag turned back to him with what Anthon did recognize as a good-natured but impersonal smile. "Good-bye," he said to the whole group, "and good luck!"

Anthon stared silently after him, stunned, as he hurried up the gangway and he and Mizhjar disappeared into the ship. Then, as the gangway began to slither back into the ship, he turned back to his colony.

And saw it transfigured. The hills were vast expanses of loneliness now, the chorus from the woods warned of animal pests yet unknown, the chill breeze bore the stink of alien poisons, and the clouds that had billowed pleasantly now loomed menacingly. The idyllic landscape had suddenly become a hostile power against which Anthon was pitted with little help, unskilled and meagerly provisioned.

*Guinea pigs*, he thought bitterly. He heard the ship starting to lift off behind him, but he didn't look back. *Guinea pigs transplanted from one place where we could barely live to another that dares us to do even that.*

The ship was gone now, and Anthon finally fully realized that, for *his* people, the stars would remain unreachable long past his lifetime.

*But maybe not forever*, he thought fiercely, choking down his disappointment. *Our ancestors were at this point once. Maybe we can avoid some of their mistakes. And then someday ...*

He picked up his ax and gun and gestured to the others to follow him. They had work to do. One last time, he quietly cursed his ancestors' shortsightedness. Then he let his eyes wander to the sky and to a distant future he would never see, and somehow he managed to smile.

*Someday . . .*