

Sample Text from

The Sins of the Fathers

by

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When we finally jumped back into normal space, the three of us uncovered one of the big ports and gathered around it, drinking in the stars with a sense of relief and exhilaration I can't begin to describe. I'm a stable man—otherwise I wouldn't have had a chance at this job—but nobody can spend two months in a tin can, cut off from all direct evidence that the rest of the universe exists, without it getting to him at least a little. So it was a great feeling to be back among real, glowing stars.

Of course, the stars themselves reminded us we were a long way from home. The constellations don't change quite as much as you might think in 130 light-years, but they change a lot—enough so we couldn't find any part of the sky to feel at home with. And the thought that we had, in a sense, also gone 130 years into Earth's past didn't help us feel any less isolated.

For a moment I almost grasped the full reality of our situation, and I shivered a little. Dirk Borowski, the skipper, felt it too. "The mind boggles," he said, very quietly. "Three of us out here, over a hundred light-years from any other member of our species. And some of them are star-hopping too—though closer to home. Who would have thought we'd be so far so soon?"

We were silent for a while. Then Lewiston, the astronomer behind our mission, slapped both hands down against his sides as if to shatter our mood and turned away from the port. "Well," he announced, "we're here and we have work to do. I hope your timing was good, Skipper." And he walked briskly away to start his observations of S Andromedae. I never got any idea how much he shared our feelings when the stars came back. I'd already learned that he kept any feelings he might have neatly hidden behind a perpetual grin that reminded me of a mild-mannered Cheshire cat, and this time was no exception.

I followed him across the cabin. He stopped and activated a large curved screen. Mostly, it darkened; but pinpoint images of stars, accurately brightness-coded, sprang into being all over it. I checked the automatic instruments that were to carry out a dozen other experiments, then activated another screen similar to Lewiston's. It would show me the entire sky either as we actually saw it from here or as astronomers on Earth had predicted we should, and by asking the computer to compare the two views and point out discrepancies, with little red circles on the screen, I might discover significant things never before suspected.

There were three red circles, and one of them, in a region of dense star-clouds, I couldn't explain away. "Dr. Lewiston," I said, "I've found an anomaly."

"Just a minute, Mr. Turabian. I'm busy right now." While I waited, it seemed to me that something about the anomaly's location should be ringing a bell in my mind. But I wasn't used to seeing the sky from this viewpoint

When Lewiston saw it, his grin seemed to increase a little, although changes in his expression were always so slight as to be uncertain. "Interesting, all right," he muttered. "Wouldn't want to get my hopes up, but it could be a fresh supernova right here in our galaxy. Even better than S Andromedae. Talk about serendipity!"

It was serendipity, all right, but not the way he was thinking. By that time I'd clarified in my mind what was special about the anomaly's position. "Do you suppose there's any special significance in its being in that direction?" I asked.

For a full second, his Cheshire grin deserted him completely. And that I found frightening.

—From the trip journal of Jonel Turabian

I

Henry Clark, Lieutenant Commissioner of Grants, stood in the main cabin of the newly returned *Archaeopteryx* and watched, slightly dazed by the events of the last few hours, as two white-coated attendants led Donald Lewiston out into the Florida sun. The once-eminent astronomer looked only slightly more unkempt than before the trip, with the same plain and slightly sloppy suit and the same token collection of brown hairs plastered radially around his bald spot, but his face had changed immeasurably. There was a dazed blankness in his eyes now that was chilling to behold, and he let himself be led away with neither resistance nor cooperation of any kind.

Only minutes earlier, Clark had watched other attendants remove the corpse of Skipper Borowski from the ship's freezer, cover it, and wheel it on a cart through the same door. And he still had only the dimmest possible understanding of what had happened.

For him, it had begun with the urgent message that the *Archaeopteryx* was on the verge of landing—and that Ship's Mate Jonel Turabian was in command and wanted to see Clark and nobody but Clark when he arrived. Now Turabian emerged from the automatic debriefing chamber that had been brought aboard and said quietly, "I'm sorry this has to be your first look at our triumphant return, Mr. Clark. I guess you can see now why I didn't want anybody coming aboard right away except you and a few attendants you could trust."

Clark nodded absently, noting at the same time that his glasses were pinching his nose and he would have to get them fixed. "Yes, of course. Quite a mess. I'm still not clear on what happened. You say Dr. Lewiston went berserk and attacked Borowski?"

"Yes. From behind. With one of our bulkhead tools, which is basically a very big wrench with several special-purpose attachments." Turabian, young, slender, and dark-skinned, was carefully and thoroughly conditioned both physically and mentally, and Clark envied his calm self-control under the present circumstances. Of course, he

had had a lot of time to adjust to them “I managed to pull him off and subdue him, but too late. “

“A pity,” said Clark. “You tried, anyway. What do you suppose happened to unsettle him like that? Lewiston, I mean.”

Turabian shrugged. “It happened in super-c. Can you imagine what that’s like? When you’re going faster than light, you can’t see any of the normal objects that aren’t. If you look out a port, there’s nothing there. Absolutely nothing. So you learn not to look out ports, but when you’re in super-c week after week without a break, you’re likely to think about it now and then. The Rao-Chang drive is so new there’s no medical data to back me up, but I’d bet that that feeling of isolation can be rough on the marginally stable. And I’d say Lewiston fit that description. I guess it just got to him.”

Clark raised an eyebrow. He was unused to hearing one of the world’s top astronomers described in such terms. “Oh?”

“I’d say so. Did you know him, Mr. Clark?”

“Slightly. “

“You may have noticed his facial expression. He grinned—always. It wasn’t an unpleasant grin, but it was always the same, so you could never tell what he was thinking. I think it was a mask he cultivated deliberately. He always seemed unemotional, but I’ve got a hunch that a good deal went on inside, with a tight lid on it. The grin was all you saw until the lid blew, but if there was enough under the lid, it might. not take much to blow it.”

Clark nodded noncommittally. He hadn’t known the man well, but from the little he remembered and the little he knew about psychology, Turabian’s explanation might be plausible. Still, it was shocking to think of the astronomer suddenly turning on the captain of the ship whose launching he had inspired. Committing violent, senseless murder . . .

He changed the subject. “We should try to remember Dr. Lewiston as he *was*. Did he get the spectra he wanted from S Andromedae?”

“Yes. They’re quite good.”

“And you brought them back safely?”

“Yes. Those, and the results of all the other experiments we were commissioned to do. We were all finished with those and well on our way home before—”

“Good.” Anxious to avoid, for the moment, getting back to the

murder (*was it murder if Lewiston was insane at the time?*), Clark asked quickly, “Could you show me some of your findings?”

“I’d rather not now, if you don’t mind.” Turabian looked past the still-open hatch at the sunshine and landing field and the blue sky and tropical plants and ocean beyond. He smiled apologetically. “A little later, certainly. But please remember I’ve just been through the same months of isolation as Lewiston. Plus witnessing that grisly incident on board and then having to bring the ship home singlehandedly while baby-sitting a helpless, demented astronomer. What I need more than anything else right now is a booster shot for my own sanity—like a couple of days of quietly wandering around out there soaking up the atmosphere of good old Earth. “

“I understand.” Clark hesitated briefly, then added, “But it’s possible that some of the others with experiments on the *Archaeopteryx* will hear that she’s back and start badgering us for information. And, distasteful as it is, the Foundation will certainly have to have an immediate inquiry to formulate an official report on this business—and a way of handling PR when the news breaks. We should be able to get in touch with you if necessary. Could I persuade you to carry a pager?”

“Well . . . OK. But please don’t bother me unless it’s absolutely necessary.”

“We’ll do our best. Thanks, Jonel. And in case nobody’s mentioned it, welcome home.” They left the ship together, crossed a strip of field still clear of all personnel in accord with Turabian’s prelanding stipulations, and stopped in at the Foundation’s port office to pick up a phone. “Take a couple of good days to unwind,” Clark told Turabian as he handed him the tiny instrument, “and then we should be able to get everything sorted out in a week or so.”

Turabian went out. As soon as he had left, Clark got on the phone to Joe Sanchez, the Foundation’s chief counselor, in New York. When he got an answer, he didn’t even try to keep the worry out of his voice. “Joe, I’m down at Kennedy Spaceport and we have a real mess on our hands. Can you come down right away and talk it over?”



Turabian went to his quarters, making sure that nobody he knew was around, and changed into a tan outfit that he felt sure would be inconspicuous. He did indeed need time to unwind—among other

things—and being recognized by tourists, with the resulting celebrity treatment, wasn't the way to do it. He didn't need to worry about intentional publicity, of course—Clark had every incentive to keep his return as quiet as possible, as long as possible. But it was worth a little conscious effort to blend quietly into his surroundings.

He felt a little guilty about not letting Sandy know he was back, of course. Once or twice he almost decided to call her, but then stopped himself. He wanted to see her, but it would have to wait. Right now he really needed to be alone, away from everybody else. Even Sandy.

Wearing sunglasses adjusted to their darkest setting, he hopped an uncrowded ground shuttle and rode it to a seaside park he knew a few miles down the coast. It had a narrow mile-long strip of light sandy beach between the ocean and a group of tropical gardens, with enough paths winding among the lush vegetation to provide effective solitude for quite a while. He strolled along the paths slowly, savoring the impressions of Earth that flowed to him through all his senses. The isolation of super-c, and the realization that he was alone with two others more than a hundred light-years from all other men, had brought a kind of awe-filled exhilaration, but being back was a more than welcome change of pace. Out there, there were no sea breezes bringing him that salty smell with the musical accompaniment of breakers on the beach. There was no feel of warm sand underfoot. There were no palms waving against a backdrop of massive white cumulus clouds in a deep blue sky that stretched, wide open, to the horizon.

No, he thought with a slight chuckle, remembering space even as he sought to reattune himself to Earth, *but there are other things. Things that palm trees can't replace any more than they can replace palm trees. I'll be back someday.*

Gently, he nudged his mind back to Earth. He stayed on the beach for a long time, occasionally wandering to the water's edge but more often using the twisting paths to avoid the park's few other visitors. Gradually he relaxed and began to feel at home.

And then the other thoughts began to surface. OK—let them. He would have to face them soon enough, and he wanted to be calm and relaxed when he did. That was why he had come out here.

He had not been entirely candid with Clark, and that bothered him a little. He hadn't told any lies, but he had selected his pieces of

truth with care, and he was sufficiently attached to openness and honesty that even that bothered him. He would feel more at ease when everything was out in the open.

Of course I'm going to tell them, he thought defensively, as if answering some accuser inside his head. I just need time to think it over. Want to make absolutely sure it's the right thing to do.

Such thoughts, of course, implied doubt. That had been Lewiston's undoing. Doubt. Well, there *was* doubt. It was important to be sure he was doing the right thing. But eventually he would have to make a decision and live with it, whatever its consequences.

The thoughts began to churn in his mind, goading him toward action. A part of his mind was back aboard the *Archaeopteryx*, hopping from scene to scene, sampling snatches that seemed immeasurably far away and at the same time vivid and urgent.

"Maybe," Lewiston said over and over, each time introducing some scholarly string of qualifiers. "But none of that matters, because there"—he pointed to the screen—"is the reality. "

It was starting to come back to me now, and I didn't like it. I asked him about the other indications, and he nodded. "Dangerously?" I asked.

"I'm not sure," he said. "We're not well instrumented in that area. And I'm not a biologist. "

We talked some more. Details blurred; they don't matter. Then I heard Lewiston say, "After all, they have 130 years. "

"They don't have 130 years," I corrected bluntly, amazed that he would forget the cosine factor. He must really be rattled.

Turabian's mind snapped back to the present. The sun was getting low beyond the trees to the west, and his wandering thoughts had filled him with a fresh sense of urgency. If he caught a shuttle right away, he could still get into a town and get a few things done tonight.

Let's see, he thought as he turned, checked his pockets, and started with sudden briskness for an exit. A library, certainly . . . and a doctor. . . .



"Archaeopteryx," Joe Sanchez mused idly, still experimenting to find the most comfortable position for his huge frame in the chair Clark had provided. "Odd name for a ship like that. Any special

reason for it?”

“More or less.” Clark, seated behind the big steel desk and still unnerved by the whole affair, wished Sanchez would quit beating around the bush. But he knew that was unlikely. Sanchez would come to the point in his own good time, and until then there was nothing to do but go along with him and try to appear patient. “The archaeopteryx was the first bird; its modern namesake is one of the first starships, based on the fundamental breakthrough Rao and Chang made a few years before the turn of the century. But even more than that, from our point of view, the original archaeopteryx was a bird of the past. That’s what our ship was supposed to be.”

Sanchez, in the process of lighting a cigar, lifted his shaggy eyebrows and blew a cloud of smoke out through his mustache. “And what’s that supposed to mean?”

“You haven’t been following this? Well, Donald Lewiston heard a couple of remarks in his youth that stuck with him and so I guess they’re sort of behind this whole project. The first was by a man named John Campbell—back when going to the Moon was big news—to the effect that what astrophysics needed most was not bigger and better telescopes or spectroscopes, but a time machine. Lewiston was one of the first—or at least most vocal—to recognize that the Rao-Chang FTL drive could provide some of the same advantages.”

Sanchez looked interested but didn’t speak. After a brief pause, Clark went on. “The other remark that influenced Lewiston came from a professor he had as an undergraduate. Do you know what a supernova is?”

Sanchez nodded. “When a star goes *bang*?”

“Right. A bigger-than average bang. There hasn’t been one in our galaxy for centuries, but in 1885 there was one right next door—S Andromedae, in the great spiral galaxy M31. An unusually favorable location for study—except that photographic spectroscopy wasn’t well developed yet. Lewiston’s professor’s remark was simply that if S Andromedae had been just twenty years later—or a thousandth of a percent farther away—we would now know far more about supernovae than we do.”

Sanchez grunted. “And so Lewiston wanted to take this . . . er . . . ‘time machine’ back to 1885 for a better look?”

“In a manner of speaking. Not in every sense, of course—no meeting great-grandma as a young girl or anything like that. But the light that came past Earth in 1885 was now a little over a light-century past us, and since the Rao-Chang drive can move much faster than light, it would be a fairly simple matter to go out and overtake it. That way we’d get a look at the same view we missed in 1885. It would even be as bright, for all practical purposes, since a light-century is a very small fraction of the total distance the light traveled.”

Sanchez knocked a long ash off his cigar. “A cute idea,” he said. “But you said it went out over a hundred light-years. That’s a lot farther than any of the other Rao-Chang ships have gone. I’m surprised the Foundation approved it so soon—especially just for one man to go look at one star.”

“It almost didn’t. The other ships are looking for colony sites; the *Archaeopteryx* was a purely scientific venture, and the Foundation did indeed balk at supporting it. But Lewiston was determined, and despite the popular picture of him as shy and mild, he could be shrewd and even ruthless when he was after a grant. When we made it clear that we wouldn’t risk a trip of that length and potential danger just for his supernova spectra, he conned a dozen other influential astronomers and physicists into letting him run experiments for them on the same trip. They wouldn’t have to go along—the instrumentation could be so automated that the ship needed no crew beyond one pilot, one full-fledged astronomer, and a mate who could double as the astronomer’s assistant. So he finally convinced us that the scientific value could be made commensurate with the cost and risk of life.” Clark smiled self-consciously. “In fact, some of us had very high hopes for this expedition.”

Sanchez took a long draw on his cigar, blew a mediocre smoke ring, and cleared his throat. “I see. And now the expedition’s back—with the pilot dead, the astronomer insane, and nobody left to tell about it but the mate.”

Clark winced. *Well*, he thought with a sigh, *at least he did finally get back to the point.*

There was an awkward silence while Clark tried to think what to say. Then Sanchez said, in the same musing way he said so many things, “I wonder if it was really wise to let that fellow—Turabian?—wander around with nobody sure where he was going. “

Clark blinked, startled. “Why shouldn’t he?”

“Well, I gather you didn’t question him very thoroughly. I haven’t had a chance to question him at all. “

“He’ll be back.” With sudden surprised comprehension, Clark laughed nervously. “Oh, come on, Joe! This isn’t a murder mystery!”

“Isn’t it? I mean, are you sure? I’m not saying you’re wrong; I’m not saying our problem is going to be any more than figuring out the most delicate way to tell the world that Lewiston did just what Turabian says he did. But, at this point, is it really so obvious that Turabian’s story is true?”

“I don’t see—”

“You don’t see any clear-cut evidence of exactly what happened, do you? I don’t think you will, either. Turabian says they struggled; the bulkhead tool would have had both sets of fingerprints on it, and they’ve probably both been cleaned off. All I’m saying is that Turabian told you one version of what happened, and there may be others. Which came first—Lewiston’s mental breakdown or his alleged killing of the skipper? If the murder came first and maybe brought on the collapse—did Lewiston *do* it or *witness* it? Whoever did it, *why*? If Lewiston’s insanity came first, what precipitated it? No matter how it happened, all those questions need good solid answers before the Foundation can adopt a strong position on this matter. And I don’t see how we can get good solid answers when we don’t even know where Turabian is. “

Clark scowled, feeling simultaneously slightly ashamed that he hadn’t thought of the same questions earlier and more than slightly annoyed that Sanchez was making such a big deal of Turabian’s temporary absence. “You’re making a big fuss over nothing,” he said. “Look, I know Jonel Turabian. I trust him. There’s no problem.”

“You’re too willing to trust people,” Sanchez told him bluntly. He looked really disturbed. “Too willing for your own good. I’ve often worried about that, Henry. Frankly, you never did know how to use power. You’ve got to realize that the people you can’t trust are going to be very careful to make you think you can—so you don’t dare really trust anybody. You’ve got away with it so far, just dealing with grant applications and such. But maybe someday you’re going to find yourself dealing with something more important, and somebody you trust is going to catch you so off-guard it’ll make your head

spin. I just hope now's not the time." He shrugged, but annoyance and frustration were strong in his usually undemonstrative face. "My advice would have been to keep him here until this whole thing's cleared up. But all I can do is advise. I can't make you listen to me. What are you going to do now?"

Clark pressed his lips together and silently studied Sanchez's face for several seconds before answering. Sanchez was being unreasonable—ridiculous. And yet, however slightly, he had managed to erode Clark's certainty that he could trust Jonel. Clark resented that. Finally he said coldly, "Do you want me to get him back here?"

Sanchez's eyebrows rose slightly, very briefly. "Can you?"

"Of course. I asked him to carry a pager when he left the spaceport. He took it without the slightest hesitation. "

"Ah"—Sanchez smiled—"but will he *answer* it? I suggest you try him."

There was a phone on the desk. Somewhat apprehensively, Clark punched the code for the one he had given Turabian. An intermittent musical hum told him the call was getting through.

But nobody answered. Clark began to sweat with the third buzz, and he grew steadily tenser with each later one. He quit after twenty buzzes and turned away from the phone, badly shaken. "If it is a murder mystery," he asked almost inaudibly, "who has jurisdiction out there?"

"I don't know," Sanchez replied with a shrug. "But I certainly want to talk to somebody—preferably a psychologist—who knew Lewiston before the trip. And Turabian too. "



As he worked at his tissue analyzer, Dr. Sidney Marvin kept stealing furtive glances at his unexpected late patient. He felt just the slightest twinge of unprofessional annoyance—it was dark out already; and he had been all set to go home to Cynthia and supper when this young man showed up insisting that he had to know right away how much danger he'd been exposed to. He'd tried to convince the man—Jim Koehler, he said his name was—that doing the tests tonight wasn't going to be any better than doing them tomorrow morning. But Koehler had protested that. he wouldn't be able to sleep until he knew, and he had made enough of a scene that Marvin finally gave in. Now he kept thinking that something in the man's manner didn't quite

ring true. And he felt that he ought to recognize him, even though he was quite sure he knew no Jim Koehler.

He turned away from the big stainless-steel box and walked back to the patient, examining the readouts as he went. “Well, Mr. Koehler, you can relax. There doesn’t seem to be any damage, either functional or genetic. I don’t think we’ll even need to check the crystal dosimeter you brought along.”

“Please do,” Koehler said at once. “It’s possible that I was in a position where something shielded me from most of the radiation. I’d still like to know how bad the general levels got.”

“But—”

“Please. You already put the crystal in the evaluator, so it’s just a matter of looking at the results. Right?”

Marvin started to argue, then shrugged and walked over to the evaluator. He took out the crystal and the card that lay next to it, which contained an automatically printed summary of its indications. He gave the card a perfunctory glance, then did a double take and stared hard and long at it. Finally he said, “Good. heavens, Mr. Koehler, you *were* lucky! You haven’t been messing around with unlicensed radiation research, have you? That’s very dangerous—”

“No,” Koehler interrupted, “I haven’t. May I see that card, please?” Before Marvin thought to stop him, he scooped up the crystal and the evaluation and stuck them in his pocket.

Marvin realized a little later that he should have insisted on getting the card back immediately. Now all he thought to do was to blurt out, “Well, if you haven’t been doing unauthorized research, where on earth did you get exposed to stuff like this?”

Koehler flashed him a quick, odd, almost humorless smile. “Funny you should ask that, but I don’t think the answer’s really important to your diagnosis. Thanks, Doctor. You’ve been a big help. I believe you said your fee would be ninety dollars.” He pressed a hundred into Marvin’s palm and disappeared through the door.

Five minutes later, Marvin remembered why he had seemed to recognize Koehler. His mouth dropped open, he stopped suddenly with his hand on the doorknob, and after two seconds’ hesitation he rushed back to the phone and picked it up. “Long distance information, please.”

II

Stephan Kovacs was still in New York when they called him the next morning, but Sanchez and Clark agreed that even small nuances might be revealing enough to warrant using a shielded picture-phone line. The image that looked out of the screen at them resembled a very distinguished white-haired walrus with rimless glasses, but there was nothing comical about the psychiatrist's speech. His words came quietly, carefully, and were trimmed right to the point. "Yes," he said, "Donald Lewiston has been placed under my care."

"And you also handled his original screening examination before he was cleared to supervise the experiments on the *Archaeopteryx*?" Sanchez asked his question without ever moving his eyes from the screen. Clark just listened from the sidelines.

"I did."

"You got to know his character pretty well?"

"I'd say so."

Sanchez lit his first cigar of the morning, talking offhandedly around it as he did so. "Dr. Kovacs, you've already been told that when Lewiston came back in this condition, the original pilot of the ship was found to have been murdered. This is all very awkward for the Foundation. We're trying to find out exactly what really happened before word gets out and the public starts ad-libbing. So please keep whatever we say under your hat."

"Naturally," said Kovacs, with a hint of impatience.

"The ship's mate, who was the only one aboard in a condition to tell us anything, says Lewiston broke down under strain during the trip and killed the skipper. Does that sound likely?"

"It's quite possible."

"The mate says he often suspected that Lewiston could suffer such a breakdown rather easily. He mentioned Lewiston's usually wearing a characteristic fixed smile, which to him suggested that Lewiston's outward appearance of self-control was maintained by

what he described as ‘a tight lid that might blow off.’ Does that jibe with anything you found in your screening tests?”

Kovacs nodded slightly. “There was an edge there, rather sharp and well defined. Lewiston knew where it was, though, and did an admirable job of staying back of it.”

“But you do think he could have been pushed over?”

“Yes. Under the right circumstances.”

“The mate blamed it on the feeling of isolation while they were going faster than light, when the stars are invisible for an extended period. Do you think that could have done it?”

The psychiatrist smiled almost imperceptibly. “Well, I’ve never actually experienced super-c myself, but I’d have to say no. It would have taken more than that to send Lewiston over the edge, or I never would have OK’d him for the trip. It would have taken something more specific—more of a definite shock.”

“Hm-m-m.” Clark noticed a fleeting expression of *something* on Sanchez’s face. Then the counselor continued smoothly, “The ship’s mate we’re talking about is named Jonel Turabian. Did you screen him also?”

“Yes.”

“Is it possible that Turabian himself killed the skipper, witnessing that act triggered Lewiston’s collapse, and Turabian took advantage of that to transfer the blame to Lewiston?”

Kovacs looked surprised, “Highly unlikely,” he said. “Turabian was quite stable. It would have been very hard to drive him to something like that. He was about as far from homicidal tendencies as anybody I’ve ever examined. It’s a simple matter to run a lie detector test on him if you’re in doubt, but I’d put money on what it’ll show.”

“You feel pretty sure Lewiston did it, then?”

Kovacs nodded. “*He* thinks he did. He’s in no condition to give us much more information, but I think he’s right.”

Sanchez thanked him and broke the connection.

“Well,” he said, turning to Clark, “looks like you were right. It isn’t a murder mystery.” Clark had already started to feel relieved, but Sanchez immediately added, “It may be something much worse.”

The smile Clark had started to form dissolved. “What?”

“According to Kovacs, Lewiston did just what Turabian said he did. *Except* that what sent him over the brink was something more

than just the isolation in super-c. So what was it?"

Clark's jaw dropped slowly as he grasped Sanchez's point. Something must have happened out there. Something drastic enough that it drove Lewiston insane and made Turabian not want to talk about it.

What?

"I think," Sanchez said earnestly, "it may be important. I think we'd better try again to get Turabian back here as soon as possible and find out what happened that he's covering up. Want to try his communicator again?"

Clark nodded unenthusiastically. Fearing the same response—or nonresponse—as before, he reached for the phone.

And it rang.

He picked it up, startled. "Hello? Henry Clark here."

It was the Foundation office in New York. "Mr. Clark," said a smooth-voiced young lady, "we had an odd phone call last night, from a small town somewhere down there—Wabasso, I think it was. An MD named Marvin said he'd just had a patient who was acting strangely and was concerned about some radiation he'd supposedly been exposed to. He didn't show any body damage, but he brought along a crystal dosimeter that showed definitely alarming levels. And—get this—after the man had gone, this Marvin thought he recognized him as one of our Rao-Chang crewmen. Description sounded like Jonel Turabian. Is that possible?"

"We'll look into it," Clark said. "Anything else?"

There wasn't. As soon as that connection broke, Clark punched out Turabian's code as fast as he could. He felt tremendous relief when, after the first buzz, Turabian's voice said softly, "Yes?"

"Jonel!" Clark said with noticeable surprise. "You had us worried. Why didn't you answer when I tried to call you last night?"

"I was with somebody, and you wanted me to be inconspicuous, didn't you? So I thought it would be best to ignore the pager right then."

"OK. Was the somebody you were with a doctor?"

Turabian sounded startled. "How did you know that?"

"Never mind that now. Joe Sanchez came down from New York, and we need to talk to you right away. Where are you?"

"Public library in Palm Beach. "

"That'll keep. We'd like you back here as soon as possible. "

“Can you give me another hour or two? I need some more information and—”

“You can get it later. Please, Jonel—*now*.”

Reluctantly Turabian said, “OK. Be there shortly. Maybe I can take some of this with me and read it on the way. So long.”

As Clark hung up, he frowned. Now *what*, he wondered, *can be so all-fired urgent about a public library?*



Turabian arrived early in the afternoon, which was quite reasonable, but Clark’s cordiality was strained as he welcomed him back and led him into the small conference room that he and Sanchez had appropriated. As soon as they were all seated around a small oval table with a magic slate top, Clark said bluntly, “You’ve been holding out on us, Jonel. We talked to the psychiatrist who dealt with Lewiston both before and after your trip, and he says Lewiston wouldn’t have cracked the way he did just from spending time in super-c. He says something else must have happened. Then we find out that in your first few hours back on Earth you’ve gone to a private doctor under a phony name with a worry about radiation dosage. Something’s very fishy here, Jonel. What is it? What happened out there?”

Clark was prepared to meet resistance, but Turabian simply nodded, thoroughly unruffled, and said, “You’re right.” It seemed to Clark, somehow, that he looked disturbingly calm and solemn. “I have been holding out, and I’m sorry. But I’m ready to tell you about it now. It’s important and it’ll take a little while, so make yourselves comfortable and listen closely.” He glanced from Clark to Sanchez and back again, as if waiting. Clark, feeling fidgety, made a determined effort to look relaxed and attentive. Finally Turabian asked, “Do you know what a Seyfert galaxy is?”

Clark searched his memory for the term. Sanchez said, “I don’t.”

“Neither does anybody else, really,” said Turabian. “We’ve only seen a few, and those from great distances, so we don’t know much about them. We know they’re spiral galaxies like ours, and they have small bright nuclei—or small bright regions in their nuclei—and peculiar spectra with strong emission lines and a lot of Doppler broadening. Some of them are strong radio sources. Some people have thought they may be important sources of high-energy cosmic rays. But nobody’s sure what the mechanism is, except that it seems to be

some kind of explosion involving the nucleus as a whole. Possibly a chain reaction of supernovae—or maybe something else, but that at least helps you picture the order of magnitude. Imagine tens of thousands of things like S Andromedae occurring in a few years in a small region of space, and you may get some of the right idea.”

Clark squirmed uncomfortably in his chair. What was the man driving at?

Turabian continued, but changed his tack. “Now consider this. We liked to think of the *Archaeopteryx* as going into the past—by running after the light from S Andromedae, we reached a point where we were seeing things on that side of the sky as Earth had seen them in the past. Not all at the same time in the past—the exact amount depended on direction, from practically zero for distant objects straight out to the sides up to 130 years for things straight back—but all in the past. But at the same time, and in just as real a sense, we had moved into other parts of Earth’s *future*. We had moved *closer* to objects on this side of the sky, and so were seeing them by light that wouldn’t reach Earth for some time yet.

“The center of our galaxy was about sixty degrees from our forward direction on the *Archaeopteryx*. Not straight ahead, but definitely in the ‘future’ half of our sky. And that’s where we saw the anomaly.”

Clark frowned. “What anomaly?”

“A bright spot that nobody’d ever seen before. Nobody’s ever seen the galactic center, you know, although we’ve known where it is for some time. It’s thirty thousand light-years off and hidden behind thick clouds of interstellar smog. But *we* saw it, right through all that stuff. And that means it was bright.”

Clark felt a chill trying to start up his spine. Sanchez said, “Are you trying to say our galaxy’s going to become one of those Seyfert things?”

“I’m saying it already has. It happened some thirty thousand years ago; the light and radiation just hasn’t reached us yet. But we’ve seen it coming. It has the right kind of spectrum, and it’s coming from a point quite far off in the right direction. It’ll get here.”

“OK,” Sanchez said quietly, “when?”

“A very pertinent question.” Turabian nodded. “We weren’t in a position to fully evaluate the danger, what with limited cosmic ray

instrumentation, medical knowledge, pertinent references in the ship's database, and time. But we did find references indicating that radiation levels in an exploding galaxy could get high enough to wipe out life-forms on planets all over the galaxy. So we rigged a dosimeter on the ship's exterior to get data that could be analyzed later to give us an idea what Earth was going to be up against. And then we started home—jumping in and out of super-c several times to look at the explosion from various distances and find out when it starts.”

This is crazy, Clark thought. He's talking seriously about the center of our galaxy exploding and destroying life on thousands of planets including this one—and it seems so far from reality that I don't feel anything at all about it. Nothing. But slowly, insidiously, the feeling was starting to build up.

He heard Sanchez say, “And what did you find? I take it 130 years was an upper limit—”

“Sixty-five years was an upper limit,” Turabian corrected. “There's a cosine factor in it because we hadn't traveled straight toward the galactic center.” He quickly sketched the geometry on the tabletop. “Lewiston forgot it, too—and when he forgot something as basic as that, I knew he was really upset. The minute he first realized the bright spot was toward the galactic center was the first time I ever saw him lose his grin, and he was never the same after that. When we started hopping home, he looked up everything the computer had on Seyfert galaxies, and he worried. Sometimes he got obsessed with the idea that we must stop wasting time and get the warning home as fast as possible. Other times he thought we shouldn't deliver it at all because there wasn't really any danger, and warning Earth would achieve nothing but unnecessary terror. And at still other times he thought we shouldn't deliver it because the danger was real and so bad that nothing could be done—so a quiet finish would be better than spending our last days worrying about the inevitable.

“More and more, during the long days in super-c, he took to sitting silently and morosely in a corner, never speaking except for occasional spells of hallucinations and raving on one of those themes. One of those times was when he attacked Dirk—I think he had all three of his ideas tormenting him at once that time: He struck with amazing speed and strength; I couldn't stop him in time. I don't think he even understood what he'd done afterward. All I could do was

keep him tied up, sedated, and fed, the rest of the way home.

“I only dropped below c once after that. The added strain of running the ship and taking care of Lewiston was getting to me, and, besides, there was a risk of getting stranded if I tried any more intermediate looks. So we came on in after that one. The thing in the nucleus was weaker that time, so I guess we were near the beginning, but it was still there.”

Clark shuddered. It was starting to feel more real now—about as real as the midmorning memory of a vivid nightmare. “So,” he asked, “how long do we have?”

“At most,” said Turabian, “twenty years.”

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