

Chapter Twelve

“So is it real?” Montgomery asked, frowning through the front window of the bridge. The lights of the mooring towers winked an inviting green, showing they were open and ready to receive ships, and a simple spyglass showed human figures moving around. The *Endeavor’s* arrival hadn’t gone unnoticed, and the port was clearly preparing for it to dock.

“It is real,” Jonathan said with certainty. He could tell it was no illusion, though he didn’t believe it was in any way genuine. A clean, bright, well-featured town didn’t spring up in the middle of nowhere in just a few years, especially with no hint of such an undertaking in Beacon.

“Perhaps it is real, but it cannot be legitimate,” Antomine said, hands clasped behind his back and eyes narrowed as he looked out at the clean stone and bright-burning lamps. “From whence came these people and these supplies? A settlement is no small undertaking, much less one where every pound of metal and stone would have to be ferried out by airship.”

“Right,” Montgomery said, tamping down his pipe and striking a match. He began puffing as it slowly lit, regarding the impossible town warily. The *Endeavor* held its position, its approach held in abeyance until a decision could be made. “The thing is, we need the zint and the lifting gas. I don’t think we have any choice but to stop here, but how safe is it?”

“Mister Heights?” Antomine said, deferring to Jonathan’s judgement.

“As you say, we have little choice,” Jonathan replied, drumming his fingers on the head of his cane. “Trying to reach any of the other options would bring us dangerously low on our distilled terrestrite stock, correct?” Jonathan raised his brows at Montgomery, who nodded gravely. “Then we will simply have to resupply from whatever this is. We will be careful, we will be watchful, and we will inspect everything. But unless this is another cultist haven, it is a less certain risk than moving on.”

“Mister Antomine, Mister Heights, I would ask that you appraise the situation before I let any of my crew go a-land,” Montgomery said somberly. “This is beyond our ken.”

“I’ll go too,” Eleanor volunteered, and Jonathan nodded as he knew her methods of inquiry would be far different than his own.

“Certainly,” Jonathan conceded. “Have you ever used a flight suit, Mister Antomine?”

“Not for some time,” Antomine said, breaking out into a youthful smile. “But I can manage.”

Jonathan had a low opinion of flight suits, despite them being necessary on an airship and the only way to descend without bringing the ship unacceptably close. Nevertheless, he descended to the lower deck and put one on, noting in passing that the particular model was clearly taken from the mercenaries rather than being of the *Endeavor’s* original complement. Jonathan ensured the winged oversuit did not muss his usual attire, and checked the control wire where it hooked through the flight suit’s sleeve, before turning to check on Antomine. Eleanor hadn’t taken a flight suit, but Jonathan was certain she would use her own particular talents to get around.

With Antomine’s strange eyes hidden behind the goggles, the man looked even younger than usual. His face was eager, and he didn’t hesitate to step out of the door. Jonathan followed,

arms spread so the fabric caught the wind, the zint engine on his back supplying enough lift to keep him from simply plummeting through the air. The two of them zipped downward to the mooring towers, landing at the base of large building where the dockmaster would be.

The people Jonathan saw in passing seemed entirely normal, possibly suspiciously so. They looked clean, happy, and healthy under the abundant zint light, lifting hands to wave at the pair of them. All of them were engaged in their labors, going about the business of maintenance and repair even if the *Endeavor* was the only ship currently in port. Carriages rattled across the smooth flagstones of the bright and tidy streets, and the city itself carried none of the stench of some of the less civilized settlements. It was withal a most pleasant town, and so disturbed Jonathan all the more.

By the time they landed, the portmaster had stepped out to greet them. He was a mountain of a man, both tall and wide, straining the seams of his uniform and beaming at them from a face creased with a lifetime of ebullience. His voice as he offered his hand was gruff but friendly, the rough burr of a long-time smoker.

“Welcome to Terminus, travelers!” He smiled and shook Jonathan’s hand, then Antomine’s, grip firm without being crushing. “That ship of yours is beautiful! Feel free to moor it anywhere, you can be sure we’ll take good care of it! Oh, but let me introduce myself. I’m Connor Freeman, portmaster here in Terminus. Whom do I have the honor of addressing?”

Jonathan let Antomine handle the introductions, focusing instead on trying to find anything that might betray the true nature of Terminus. The zint mining operation in the distance rattled and clanked faintly; distilling equipment thrummed. Voices rose and fell as people talked, and in the distance, someone laughed, joyful and carefree. There was absolutely nothing that prickled his instincts, and that alone was enough to worry him.

“Exactly how long ago was Terminus founded, Mister Freeman?” Antomine asked, and the portmaster laughed.

“Before my time, I can tell you that!” Connor’s smile didn’t waver in the slightest. “But we’re up to date, I can assure you.” He slapped the side of the port building affectionately. “Don’t you worry, we ought to be able to handle most any repairs or supplies you need. We pride ourselves on our hospitality out here. Good, honest folk ought to be a light for others, after all!”

Jonathan met Antomine’s eyes, and the inquisitor simply nodded. Neither of them could detect the slightest trace of falsehood in word or deed, and while Jonathan was certainly not comfortable with the place, there was nothing that presented a reason to leave. Nothing save for its sheer impossibility, though in the east what might be considered possible or not was more fluid than within the walls of Beacon.

“I suppose we should signal Captain Montgomery to dock,” Jonathan said, reluctant more because he found *no* reason to avoid it. He did not believe that Terminus was without blemish, yet there was no sight nor sound nor smell of anything untoward. Antomine seemed similarly reluctant, but was forced to agree.

“Do you take gold in payment?” Antomine asked, and the portmaster snorted.

“Of course we do! We’re not savages out here.” Connor shook his big head at the question. “I’ll give you a fair price, too, no gouging. Better than you’d get from most places, eh?” He

laughed again and waved up at the *Endeavor*, which was primarily visible by her spotlights. “We’ve got plenty of lifting gas and terrestrite for the tanks, don’t you worry.”

Jonathan removed the beam-lantern from where it was clipped to his flight suit and ensured the lens was flipped to green, then raised it in the *Endeavor’s* direction and flashed it several times. After perhaps thirty seconds of wait, the *Endeavor’s* own lights flashed once in reply, and the engines glowed as Montgomery began maneuvering it into port. Connor watched with interest and then clapped Antomine on the shoulder before opening the door to the office.

“Come on, we’ll get your docking information taken care of and then you can relax. Believe me, you’ll like Terminus. Maybe you’ll even stay!”

Jonathan looked sharply at that last sentence, but Connor just had guileless goodwill and pride in his town. Despite his misgivings, Jonathan allowed himself to be ushered inside, into a clean, neat, and organized office, where Connor slid a ledger over for Jonathan to sign. There were other entries in it, in different hands bearing different ship names, but none that he recognized. Connor took Jonathan’s Beacon-minted coins without a qualm, and showed them to the paternoster while extolling the sights and attractions of Terminus.

They rode the lift to the *Endeavor’s* level as airmen drew in the tether lines and fixed the ship in place, unfurling the rope bridge to connect the ship to the pylon. The dock workers all looked perfectly ordinary, wearing coarse overalls and hauling lines with calloused hands. Jonathan crossed the gangplank back to the bottom deck and shucked the flight suit with relief, handing it off to one of the airmen and retrieving his cane. Montgomery arrived as Jonathan was adjusting his suit, brushing off the cuffs and straightening his tie.

“Well? What’s it like out there?”

“There is nothing untoward about anything we saw,” Antomine admitted. “I would not yet suggest shore leave, not until we spend some time examining the rest of the town.”

“I can give you maybe a day on that,” Montgomery said, glancing past them to the brightly lit, clean, and enticing settlement. “The men realize that something’s off here, but given the last couple weeks they’re going to want some time on the ground.”

“Once Eleanor returns, I suspect you’ll have your answer,” Jonathan said, following Montgomery’s gaze. “Though as Antomine said, we found nothing suspicious.”

“So what’s the catch?” Montgomery wondered aloud.

“That is the question,” Jonathan admitted. “Let us take advantage of what hospitality we may in order to repair and refresh ourselves. I will attempt to find what dangers may lurk here in Terminus, but I advise you to be ready for anything.”

“Yeah,” Montgomery said, chewing on the word, and turned to give orders. Jonathan returned to his quarters to retrieve additional liquid funds – he was beginning to run quite short, having not anticipated needing actual currency so far east – and fetch his hat. The implements he had retrieved for the ship’s defense were still on his desk, not needed for the task. He considered them for a moment, tapping his cane in thought, then left them as he returned to the lower deck.

Jonathan nodded to the airman posted at the exit and returned to the paternoster, waiting for a platform and stepping on. Antomine and Eleanor could be relied upon to investigate certain

aspects, but he needed to see the town for himself. That nothing about it disturbed his gut or raised his suspicions was, itself, so suspicious that he felt compelled to investigate further. If there was something that threatened the expedition, he needed to know.

Stepping out onto the streets of Terminus, Jonathan began to walk in toward the city center, cane tapping on the stone streets and eyes sharp. Bright green and blue vines climbed the lampposts, meticulously trimmed and lending a bright splash of color to the grey-white stone of the town. Small engravings hung from each lamppost, proclaiming street names or simply bearing a carving of a few buildings with the town's name below.

Other pedestrians nodded politely, or even smiled and waved, and once or twice he stood aside to let a family past, the gaggle of children surrounding their parents. The sight struck him strongly, reminding him of days with his father in a time before long expeditions. He had never quite managed time for a family of his own — but he shook off those thoughts and moved on.

More signs hung from buildings, proclaiming shops and businesses, each one the work of a clever hand. All sorts were represented, from clothing and cigars to He paused at a bookshop, recalling the oddities he'd found in Danner's Grasp, and after a moment stepped inside.

"Welcome!" The shopkeeper was a young man, with tousled hair and a groomed goatee, eyes bright and curious as he looked up from the book he was perusing. The interior smelled of leather and canvas without any of the must or dust of poorly kept books, and the shelves that lined the walls were neat and organized. "You must be with that ship that just came in," the shopkeeper continued, marking his place with a bookmark and setting the tome aside. "Is there anything I can help you find?"

"Perhaps," Jonathan admitted, finding himself almost disturbed by the normality of it all, but intrigued by what Terminus had to offer. "Is there anything unusual, that might only be found here? Either about Terminus itself, or this area. We're from far enough west that we don't know much about the local area," he said, testing what response that might get.

"Oh, a scholar!" The shopkeeper bustled out from behind the counter and over to the far wall. The spines of books there were in a multitude of languages, not all of which Jonathan understood, but the shopkeeper selected several in a more common tongue and held them out for Jonathan to take. "I suspect you'll find these of interest, good sir," he said.

Jonathan took them and examined the covers. One was a brief history of Terminus, another was titled *Ruins of the Choroid Wastes*. The third was a language primer for several tongues Jonathan had seen before, but only in fragments. He flipped through them briefly, finding that each of them was clearly printed, the author's style clearly understandable and thus unlike so many of the books Jonathan had been forced to rely on throughout his life.

He paid a small handful of silver for the tomes and the shopkeeper tied them in a bundle with twine. Jonathan exited the bookstore with a strange sense of familiarity, one hand on his cane and the other holding onto the twine. The entire experience hearkened strongly back to younger days when he was just exploring the secrets and histories, delving into forgotten stacks in hopes of finding some elusive hint. It was a reminiscence powerful enough to make him pause for a moment — then the sunlight burning in his soul reminded him how hollow such things were in comparison.

A woman walking some furry pet with six tiny legs and six gormless eyes circled around him with a haughty sniff, clearly irritated by his form impeding her path. Jonathan watched her go and hefted the books thoughtfully, continuing along the streets of Terminus. He knew there was something dangerous about, yet he failed to find any hint of it.

For a time he simply wandered through brightly-lit streets, peering into alleys and windows and finding only what would be expected from a small town close to Beacon. There were people happy and sad, and the occasional drunkard, but order was well kept and the city was clean. The clocks began to chime the hour in ragged chorus, announcing the end of the day. Yet every slice of friendly normalcy only convinced him further that whatever was lurking in Terminus was more subtle and terrible than he had imagined.

By the time he returned to the ship, nothing had revealed itself but mundane, safe, and innocent streets. He disliked every inch of it, but there was no detail he could point to that was even slightly threatening — save for the sheer impossibility of its existence to begin with. The crew was staring longingly down at the clean streets with taverns and inns and — no doubt — brothels, while Montgomery waited for him to permit them leave. Something that was a foregone conclusion as Jonathan had returned unmolested and burdened with his purchases.

“I can’t see any reason you can’t offer shore leave,” Jonathan said, somewhat reluctantly. “Perhaps Antomine or Eleanor will gainsay me, but I cannot find a single thing wrong with the town.”

“You hear that?” Montgomery admonished the crew. “Safe but this isn’t a home port. No wandering off by yourself and report in if there’s any trouble, even a bar brawl.” That was good enough for the airmen who weren’t involved in the repair operations, and soon enough several of them vanished out into the port. Jonathan left Montgomery to the business of resupply and returned to the upper deck with his prizes.

He was still going through the weighty tomes when Antomine returned, looking thoughtful. The young inquisitor stood at the windows of the observation room, looking out over Terminus, and said nothing for a long while. Jonathan let him take his time, taking notes from the linguistic codex and filling the silence with the gentle scratching of a pen.

“It’s not even too perfect,” Antomine said at length. “I was expecting that, were this some grand play, that it would lack all the flaws and imperfections that mark real people and real places. It is a good settlement, to the point where it could practically rival Beacon, yet it isn’t perfect. Pleasant, but not unrealistic.” He wrinkled his nose. “The local branch of the Inquisition is even fairly up-to-date and, so far as I can tell, attentive to their duties.”

“S’probably nicer than Beacon,” Eleanor said, striding into the observation room. “Less of an underworld. No Reflected Council to tell me what to do.”

“I am worried that we are not seeing the catch,” Jonathan said, marking his place and looking up from his book. “We can rest and resupply here, but what is the hidden cost?”

“Is it possible it’s just some lost settlement?” Eleanor asked. “Like, we did just run across a city that somehow got transported out here and, sure, the people didn’t really survive it. Maybe this one is different.”

“That is exceedingly unlikely,” Antomine said, turning from the view to look at Eleanor. “What hand, spending the effort to extract a small town intact and ensure there are no records of its existence, would not then bend that town to its own purposes? What force that could shelter people this far into the fastness of the east would do so without demanding payment?”

“Right, well, hard to argue with that,” Eleanor said after a considering pause. “Still, I vote we enjoy it while we can. If we’re here we’re going to run into the problem, or we won’t, and either way we might as well take advantage of what’s on offer.”

“I hope to not be here long,” Jonathan replied tersely, but didn’t object. So long as Eleanor’s indulgences didn’t delay or stymie them, they were none of his business.

“Best to make of it what we can, with much further we have to go,” Antomine said to Jonathan as he considered the town below. “Everything we can get here preserves our supplies.”

“Indeed,” Jonathan said, though the very nature of a friendly port so far out undercut his warnings and his preparations, eroding his authority. It was far harder to convince men to press on despite the risks when safety was right behind them, rather than hundreds of miles away. That every being and every place was suspect, when there were families happily walking about.

“Speaking of which, I’m going to go enjoy one of those cafés I saw,” Eleanor said, turning and giving them a languid parting wave. “You can have rations if you want.” Which was hardly fair, as they’d been dining better than most in Beacon on the bounty of the Verdant Expanse, but it was true that shipboard options were limited.

Jonathan watched her go with some misgivings. Her safety was not at risk, considering her talents, but he was far from certain about her judgement in a place like Terminus. Trying to actually curtail her behavior without any imminent threat was doomed to failure, so he was forced to leave her to her own devices.

Antomine took his leave soon after, and Jonathan spent some admittedly restful time concentrated on his tomes, like he had when he was a younger man. The familiarity in studying and translating a lost language, something spoken so long ago even the cities had crumbled to dust, distracted from the uncertainty of their port. Yet one day stretched into two, then three, as repairs were made and purchases brought aboard.

Airmen and passengers alike spent time on the streets of Terminus, but every time Jonathan stepped out of the ship he found himself more frustrated. There was not one single dark secret or threatening shadow that he could unearth, as if the entire town was constructed solely to prove him wrong about the nature of the world. He hadn’t even noticed any wildlife nearby, despite the titans that ruled the region being far too large and powerful to care about avoiding a human settlement.

Were he capable of seeing things in shadows, Jonathan was certain he would be. The enforced peace and friendliness grated at his nerves, the call of sunlight sending him out of the ship on restless feet. His patience frayed simply from anticipating something that refused to happen. Despite the time he spent wandering the town, the force behind it failed to reveal itself.

“Glad to see your face again!” The friendly shopkeeper at the bookstore said when Jonathan found himself inside once more. “Not many people are interested in the properly esoteric stuff, so it’s nice to have a customer who is.” Before Jonathan had even asked he’d bustled out from

behind the counter to open the locked cabinets at the rear of the store. “Do you think you’ll be staying?”

The question made Jonathan stop in his tracks, hand tightening on his cane. Then he turned and left the store, leaving the bewildered shopkeeper behind as he marched back toward the port and the *Endeavor’s* bulk moored at the masts. He half expected to be intercepted, the force of his conviction feeling like a physical thing crackling behind him, but the populace of Terminus evinced no more perception for the occult than most citizen of Beacon.

He waited on the paternoster, thumping his cane rhythmically against the floor in time with the progression of his thoughts, then stormed onto the *Endeavor* past the indifferent airman on duty. Jonathan went up to the mid-deck and to Montgomery’s cabin, only checking himself long enough to rap the door with the handle of his cane. The captain’s voice came, and Jonathan shoved the door open, finding the man in the middle of updating the ship’s logbook.

“Why haven’t we left yet?” Jonathan demanded, startling the man.

“I beg your pardon?” Montgomery asked, half-confused and half-offended by Jonathan’s tone.

“We didn’t really *need* supplies, save for zint and lifting gas and those would only take a day.” Jonathan planted his cane on the floor, leaning forward over Montgomery’s desk. “The repairs didn’t need a dry-dock, and they should be finished anyway.” He’d seen the patches himself, small sections of the envelope a slightly different color than the rest. “So why haven’t we left?”

“Well…” Montgomery closed the logbook, reaching for his pipe and starting to wipe out the bowl. Jonathan waited patiently the captain to collect his thoughts. “We’ve got everything we need on board, sure enough, save for the crew. All things considered, a little bit of time in a safe port will do them good.”

“Will it? It’s *not* a home port.” Jonathan scowled across the desk at Montgomery. “It may be one of the most dangerous we’ve been. They’re perfectly happy to let us stay here — and how tempting is that, to people who have been out this far?”

“I don’t imagine most of my crew would be too keen to settle down after just a couple days,” Montgomery said, opening his smoking tin and transferring some of the contents to his pipe. “We’ve been to foreign ports before.”

“A couple days, maybe not. But that turns into more days, and the temptation grows. More people leave. Then we need to start trying to recruit, and I guarantee you *that* will not work here. Even *one* crewman is a loss we can’t recover from, and trying will only make it worse.” Jonathan straightened up. “Recall the crew. Prepare to leave. Before we *can’t* leave.”

“Interrupting shore leave isn’t going to make you too popular,” Montgomery said, but the wrinkles on his brow showed that he was considering Jonathan’s point. “Or me neither. But I see your point, Mister Heights. I’ll call everyone back.”

“Good.” Jonathan gave Montgomery a sharp nod and left the cabin, but he didn’t return to his own. It would take time to round up all the airmen out in the city, and it might take more than a message to tempt Eleanor back to the *Endeavor*. She had been more seduced than most by what Terminus offered, and had spent little of their time in port aboard the ship.

He rode the paternoster down once again, taking to the streets of Terminus with a brisk stride. If nothing else, Jonathan found it fortunate the town wasn't particularly large, else finding the haunts of someone like Eleanor would have been impossible. As it was, he had to pay close attention to the street names to find the obscure corner neighborhood Eleanor had tucked herself into — then use his own judgement as to exactly which place she would be.

Fortunately, her vices didn't run to debauchery so that ruled out some of the more distasteful options, but he didn't know the woman as well as he once had. She'd been young and angry when he'd first encountered her, and most of that hadn't changed, but he wouldn't have expected the Eleanor from long ago to be taking tea in a small garden. Nor did he know who she was conversing with, but it seemed it had not taken her long to make friends within Terminus. Something that was dangerously convenient.

"Jonathan," Eleanor said, spotting him as he stepped through the garden gate. The elderly lady at the table with Eleanor matched the garden; blue and white and elegant. She favored Jonathan with a haughty frown, but he ignored her displeasure.

"Time to go, Eleanor," Jonathan said without preamble.

"You're interrupting," Eleanor replied, taking a sip of her tea. "Besides, leaving already? Isn't that a bit hasty? It's not like we're on a schedule, is it?"

"It's been four days," Jonathan said shortly. "Every moment we're here, opportunities slip by. Terminus isn't for us."

"Yeah?" Eleanor said, turning to face him more fully and brushing a stray lock of red hair from her face. "How do you know? It's great here! I don't have to worry about family, I don't have to worry about the Council. I can do whatever I want."

"So, what, you're going to stay here?" Jonathan asked, matching scorn with scorn. He leaned on his cane and looked down at Eleanor, who narrowed her eyes at Jonathan.

"You know, I just might," she challenged him. He checked his initial, explosive impulse to simply grab her and physically drag her back to the *Endeavor*. Forcing the issue would make it difficult to rely on her talents when he truly needed them. Nor did he miss the sharp eyes of the old lady, which promised to make any extraction more difficult than it otherwise needed to be.

"And then the *Endeavor* will return, and you won't be there," Jonathan told her after a moment of contemplation. "The Council will write you off; a failure. Nobody will know that you actually got out on your own terms. They won't know you won." Eleanor flinched at that, and Jonathan knew he'd read her correctly.

"You may stay here, but this place is just an end. It's giving up. It is *settling*." He kept his face a neutral mask and his tone bland, allowing the words to cut all on their own. "If all you care to do is settle, I suppose Terminus is sufficient. If you want more, we will be leaving soon."

"Now just wait a minute—" The old lady began, and Jonathan turned to her with fury and sunlight in his eyes. She shrank back from the dangerous edge in his posture, the white-knuckled grip on his cane. Eleanor sighed and stood up, blotting her mouth with a kerchief.

"Thank you for the tea, Miss Ernst. It was lovely. But I do have to go now." The old lady merely nodded tightly, still cowed by Jonathan's simmering rage, and Eleanor preceded Jonathan back

out the garden gate. She didn't speak on the way back to the ship, and neither did Jonathan, having accomplished his goal and seeing no need to dwell on it.

He almost expected to find opposition from Terminus as the two of them made their way to the port, but nothing materialized. That would be too easy, Jonathan surmised. Any hint of opposition would instantly crystallize any remnant suspicions over the nature of the trap. Jonathan knew what its risk was now, its temptation. Natural or artifice, genuine or synthetic, he was convinced its entire purpose was malign.

The Endeavor was in a state of upheaval when they emerged from the paternoster, with a swarm of activity as it prepared for departure and an argument ongoing between Antomine and Montgomery where they stood at the gangplank. Jonathan came to a halt and, while Eleanor slithered past the pair without them even realizing, the other men took notice of Jonathan and fell silent.

"Some of our men are refusing to return," Montgomery reported. "Martin and Oscar."

"The man who lost his hand, and the one who lost his sound," Antomine elaborated. "They have both opted to take the hospitality of Terminus, and I deemed it a poor idea to try and remove them by force."

"Oscar's been with me from the early days," Montgomery said, leathery scowl on his face. "Martin's new, but if this is some trap I don't want to leave my people behind. Besides, we *need* all our crew."

"They *want* us to stay," Jonathan said shortly, looking from one man to the other. "The longer we tarry, the more people will wish to remain. Recall where we are, Captain Montgomery. I would not wish to stir the collar of whatever demon lies beneath this place. Even failing that, I would not wish to consider the mischief press-ganged men might do aboard your ship."

"I don't abandon my men," Montgomery said stubbornly.

"You are not abandoning them. *They* are abandoning *you*."

"I am afraid I must agree, Captain," Antomine said, reaching up to touch the inquisition badge that he wore around his neck. "Perhaps I have failed them, else they would not feel the need to leave our company, but I do not believe it is any occult control twisting at their minds. It is simply nice here, and terrifying out there."

"Let us be gone, while we still can," Jonathan said, and swept past them to board the ship. Without any possible rejoinder, Antomine and Montgomery followed shortly after. He ascended to the third deck, finding himself alone in the observation room as the *Endeavor* prepared to cast off. Even now he was anticipating some terrible force to come and bar their way, but nothing manifested. Not that it needed to; the damage had already been done.

Eventually, the ship began to move, deck swaying underfoot, and the lights of Terminus began to recede. Jonathan returned to his cabin and removed the stack of books he had purchased there; tomes that held secrets and knowledge he'd wondered about all his life. Then, he ascended through the hatch, books balanced in one arm, and emerged onto the top deck. One by one, he hurled the books out into the darkness below.

They belonged to the past, not to the future. He'd burn it all to see sunlight again.

