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The train-wind was blowing. It found its way through the tunnels to the underground platform where Zen waited, deep beneath Galatava Station City. It stirred the litter that lay between the tracks. It ruffled Zen’s hair and plucked at the tattered sackcloth robes of the other travellers who waited all around him. Zen was the only person on the platform, but it was more crowded than he had ever seen it.

His fellow travellers were all Hive Monks, shambling insect colonies which had made human-shaped armatures for themselves and draped themselves in grimy robes. The crude, white paper masks that were their faces stared towards the tunnel mouth, and the train-wind touched them like a warm breath.

The wind smelled of dust and the black kilometres beneath the mountains. It smelled of the faint electric scent of the K-gates through which a train could cross a hundred thousand light years in a heartbeat. It smelled of the trains themselves, and now it brought with it the sound of a train, too, the deep roar of engines, a strange voice raised in song, both rising as the wind rose until a blaze of lights appeared there in the darkness and the train gathered itself out of the shadows and the racing reflections on shining rails.

Lost Hive Monk faces blew past Zen like paper plates at a windy picnic. For a moment the alien loco loomed over him: an insectoid *morvah* from the Nestworlds of the Neem, beetle-shiny, blazing with bioluminescent light, long cockroach feelers rasping along the station roof. Then the long line of windowless carriages it towed were passing, slowing, stopping.

‘The train at Platform 1 is for Hive Monks only,’ said the voice of the station AI, as if any human would be foolish enough to want to board it. ‘Hive Monks only on Platform 1.’

The Hive Monks buzzed and sighed and swayed. A few were so excited that they lost their vague human shapes completely, robes crumpling, lost bugs scuttling mindlessly across the platform or fluttering upwards to ping against the lamps. The rest surged through the open doors into the hot, dark, insect-stinking carriages.

Zen went with them, keeping his face down, trusting to the tide of ragged robes around him to hide him from the station’s cameras. He stood among the Hive Monks in the seatless carriage, in the dim red glow from the overhead lights. The doors slid shut. The Hive Monks whispered to one another in their strange voices which were made of the sound of a million insects rubbing their serrated legs against their abdomens. Zen stared at the bug-scuttling floor and waited for the train to move. What was the delay? Had someone spotted him? Would the doors open again and police come aboard to drag him back onto the platform? His heart was hammering as hard as it used to when he was just a young railhead, riding the interstellar trains with stolen trinkets in the pockets of his coat.

But that had been years ago. He was not a railhead any more. He was just Zen Starling, rich and famous and unhappy, and the only thing he was stealing was himself.