

Reading the Mind of God

by

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## Reading The Mind Of God

Character descriptions: (required: 5 men, 3 women)

Johannes Kepler: 29 years old, dark, wiry, wears glasses, often bursting with energy.

\*Magistrate

Tycho Brahe: 54 years old, a large, rotund, balding man with an enormous handlebar moustache. His most distinctive feature is his nose, which is made of silver, on which he constantly rubs ointment. His presence extends far beyond himself, and he can shift quickly between good humor and rage.

Jep: Tycho's fool, rumored to possess second sight.  
(Historically, Jep was a dwarf.)

Tengnagel: 20s, handsome, Tycho's chief assistant. (Full name was Franz Tengnagel von Camp)

Elizabeth: 23 years old, Tycho's daughter

Junior: Tycho's eldest son, a strapping young man of 19.

Christine: 40s, Tycho's common-law wife. From peasant stock.

Barbara Kepler: 25 years old. Has already lost several children to illness and is now on her third marriage. Her first two husbands were wealthy merchants, and now she's married to a nearly penniless mathematician. She is often short-tempered and melancholy.

\*Karl Styrian nobles.

\*Lena

\*Gretchen

\* = role can be doubled.

1/13/01-5.3

## Reading The Mind Of God

Scenes:

### Act I

Scene 1: Winter 1599, Graz, Styria (province of Austria)

Scene 2: February 4, 1600, Benatek Castle, near Prague

Scene 3: The following week, Kepler's Office/Kepler's mind, Benatek Castle

Scene 4: End of the week, Benatek Castle

Scene 5: Various times later, Kepler's mind/Benatek Castle

Scene 6: July, Kepler's Office

Scene 7: Kepler's mind

Scene 8: Weeks later, Kepler's Office

### Act II

Scene 1: 1601, Graz/Kepler's mind

Scene 2: Around the same time, Benatek Castle

Scene 3: Several weeks later, Benatek Castle

Scene 4: Shortly after, Benatek Castle

Scene 5: A month later, Benatek Castle

Scene 6: Shortly after, Benatek Castle

Scene 7: The next day, Benatek Castle

Benatek Castle has a dining room, an observatory, and Kepler's office.

READING THE MIND OF GOD

Setting: Bare stage.

At Rise:

Scene 1: Winter, 1599, Graz, Province of Styria, Austria (part of the Hapsburg Empire).

(JOHANNES KEPLER, dressed in shabby black mourning clothes, is shoved onto the dimly lit bare stage. He clutches a wrapped baby close to his chest. He waits, uneasily. After a moment, a MAGISTRATE enters officiously.)

MAGISTRATE

Who do we have there?

KEPLER

My daughter, Susanna... Spotted fever.

MAGISTRATE

The officers reported that you attempted to bury her while muttering Lutheran prayers.

KEPLER

I want to send Susanna back to God with prayers in which I believe.

MAGISTRATE

If the Archduke says there will be no Lutheran burials, then there will be none... Perhaps the soldiers should see if you have something to join the bonfire? They have burned ten thousand books, flames reaching to Heaven.

KEPLER

I'm sure God has taken notice.

MAGISTRATE

You'll have pay the fine and find a priest to bury her properly. That'll be twenty thaler, Herr...?

KEPLER

Kepler.

MAGISTRATE

Kepler the astrologer?

KEPLER

I am District Mathematician to the Archduke.

MAGISTRATE

My wife and I love your calendars. We planted our bean patch just when you said last year and they turned out beautiful. We've been reading your predictions ever since you forecast the Turkish invasion. My wife will be tickled to hear that I met you.

KEPLER

Perhaps we could forget about the fine?

MAGISTRATE

Maybe we could cut it down a little.

KEPLER

Five thaler?

MAGISTRATE

Can't go less than ten.

(Kepler empties his coin purse into the Magistrate's palm.)

KEPLER

Thanks for your compassion.

MAGISTRATE

Anytime. Rumor has it that all Lutheran teachers and clergy will be expelled from the Province next month. Pack your bags before it gets ugly.

(The Magistrate pockets the cash and exits. Kepler exits with the body.)

Blackout.

As Kepler exits, we hear Tycho's voice read this letter:

TYCHO

"My dearest Kepler,  
I have been welcomed by the Emperor in Prague with extreme benevolence. Having received your most recent, urgent letter, I hope that you will join me, and not because of your adversity, but because of your love and enthusiasm for science. Whatever your reason, you will find in me a friend who will not deny you.  
Given at Benatek Castle, December 9, 1599, by your very sympathetic Tycho Brahe."

SCENE 2: FEBRUARY 4, 1600, BENATEK CASTLE, NEAR PRAGUE.

(TYCHO BRAHE supervises JUNIOR and TENGNAGEL, who carry a table onstage. A huge banner unfurls on the rear wall, featuring a large painting of Tycho and his instruments, surrounded by smaller portraits of other famous astronomers. A sword hangs on the wall. Tycho is an enormous man in all ways, with a prosthetic silver nose, which he constantly rubs with ointment. Junior is a robust 19-year-old, energetic. Tegnagel, late 20s, is not pleased to be hauling furniture.)

TYCHO

Pick up your end Tegnagel! Symmetry, symmetry! The table fits in the room only one way. One way only. There you go. Now get that desk.

(Tegnagel and Junior exit.)

TYCHO (cont'd)

Have the masons finished the new wall? Someone tell them to get off their asses and do some work. I don't pay them to sit around all day.

(The men return with a desk and set it down. They are followed by a fool, dressed in motley, JEP.)

JEP

Round and round, up and down, put it here and master makes unhappy sounds.

(Tycho stomps over to them.)

TYCHO

He can't calculate next to the banquet hall! All he'll ever think about is food. Put him in the corner room.

(They carry the desk over to a corner of the stage. Jep stays with Tycho.)

JEP

The master whirlwind prepares for the dawn.

TYCHO

Why don't you make yourself useful, Jep?

(Elizabeth enters, and Tengenagel walks quickly over to her. They whisper sweet nothings.)

JEP

A fool's worth is in and of himself. In becoming useful, he ceases to be a fool, and becomes useless to all.

(Jep looks off stage suddenly, as if seeing something the others do not.)

JEP (cont'd)

The sun has crested the horizon. He sports the shoulders of a giant.

TYCHO

This is all wrong. All wrong. We should knock a window in that wall.

(Tycho turns to see Tengenagel speaking with ELIZABETH.)

TYCHO (cont'd)

Elizabeth, can't you see the man has work to do?

ELIZABETH

Daddy.

TYCHO

Tengnagel, I insist on at least three feet of separation between you and my daughter at all times. That's the perigee of your orbit around her. Elizabeth, go help your mother.

(The couple separates. Kepler enters, carrying a threadbare traveling bag.)

TYCHO

Do you have a delivery? Leave it then. Don't just stand there.

JEP

Moon (referring to Tycho) meet the Sun. Sun this is the moon.

TYCHO

State your business, man.

KEPLER

I'm Kepler.

TYCHO

Kepler? Kepler? The name sounds vaguely familiar.

TENGNAGEL

Kepler?

KEPLER

You invited me. You said--

TYCHO

Does the name sound familiar, Tengnagel?

TENGNAGEL

Schoolteacher?

JUNIOR

I expected him to be bigger.

JEP

Older.

TENGNAGEL

More intelligent looking.

TYCHO

I'm sorry, but you are clearly an impostor.

KEPLER

But... but... I'm not.

(Tycho wraps Kepler in an embrace.)

TYCHO

I'm joking! We'll have to see if we can find you a sense of humor. Welcome to Benatek Castle, Kepler. This is Tegnagel, my chief assistant. This is my eldest son, Tycho Junior. We have a little business to take care of right away, then we can celebrate. Junior, tell your mother that our guest is here. Jep, if it won't spoil your foolhardiness, carry Kepler's bag to his office.

JEP

I would be honored.

(With great pomp and ceremony, Jep carries the bag to Kepler's desk. Junior exits to the kitchen. Tycho watches Jep dourly.)

TYCHO

That fool is ripe for a dunking. (To Kepler) So how are things in Graz?

KEPLER

Very uncomfortable. Especially for Lutherans.

TYCHO

You'll find Prague much more agreeable. The Emperor is quite open-minded, and very liberal with promises of money, though good luck if you ever try to collect.

KEPLER

I hope I will have a chance to meet him.

TENGNAGEL

He doesn't see just anyone, you know.

KEPLER

I'm in the process of making a name for myself.

TYCHO

Right, right. I'm sure you'll have impressed everyone in the Empire in no time, Kepler. But before you start rubbing elbows with royalty, you might actually have to do some work.

KEPLER

I'm not afraid of hard work.

TENGNAGEL

That's what all the new assistants say.

KEPLER

I'm not--

TYCHO

Tengnagel, do you have the papers?

(Tengnagel hands papers to Tycho.)

TYCHO

Everyone who works for me needs to understand the rules.

KEPLER

With you.

TYCHO

Excuse me?

KEPLER

I was invited here to work with you, not merely for you.

TYCHO

With me, for me. It's one and the same. First--No loafing. We have meals four times a day. Christine doesn't like assistants in the kitchen at odd hours, so be on time. When we observe at night, which is almost every night, dress warmly. Also, I will need you to sign this.

(He shoves a paper in front of Kepler and hands him pen and ink.)

KEPLER

(reading it quickly) What's the meaning of this?

TYCHO

You do read, don't you?

KEPLER

Quite well.

TYCHO

Good, then sign here.

KEPLER

I will not.

TENGNAGEL

It's just the standard agreement.

TYCHO

Quite natural. All discoveries you make on my time, using my equipment and data, will be attributed to Tycho Brahe. You will discuss our work with no one. You will publish nothing of what we see, discuss, or calculate without my permission.

KEPLER

The man who makes a discovery should receive proper credit.

TYCHO

Perhaps you can go equip your own observatory.

KEPLER

And hiding our observations is wrong. We should share everything with Magini, Maestlin, Galileo. If the masters of science do not communicate with each other, how are we to make progress?

TYCHO

I have spent my life observing the stars and collecting data. If others want to see what I have seen, they can spend their own lives and fortunes acquiring the experience.

KEPLER

Will you serve as a roadblock to science?

TENGNAGEL

Don't be so dramatic, Kepler.

TYCHO

I will not give out my life's work piecemeal to astronomical beggars.

TENGNAGEL

All the assistants have signed the agreement, Kepler.

KEPLER

I have more to lose.

TENGNAGEL

Because your discoveries will be so great?

TYCHO

First he wants my help, then he treats me like a tyrannical bastard. I will allow you to see my most precious treasures, Kepler. You noticed the instruments on your way in, I hope.

KEPLER

I did glance up at the roof.

TYCHO

Have you ever seen such works of beauty? Even from a distance?

KEPLER

Never.

TYCHO

They are even more wondrous up close.

TENGNAGEL

You can't blame Tycho for being careful. There have been spies.

TYCHO

That damned Ursus, for one.

KEPLER

I've seen his system. Very similar to yours.

TYCHO

Similar? Similar!? That stinking swineherd can't add two plus two. He's trying to steal my system.

KEPLER

He was here?

TYCHO

As a guest. Wanted to see my instruments, wanted to hear all about my observations.

TENGNAGEL

I caught him myself, sneaking around.

TYCHO

I would have killed him, but he's a slippery one.

(Tycho grabs a sword from the wall and whistles it through the air, making cuts all around Kepler.)

TYCHO

I was quite the swordsman in my day. Only duel I ever lost, Parsjberg cut off my nose. Ever engage in a little swordplay, Kepler?

KEPLER

I prefer challenges of the mind.

TYCHO

How very cerebral of you.

TENGNAGEL

Sign the paper, Kepler, so we can eat.

TYCHO

(he sets the sword on the table) Come, my patience is wearing thin.

KEPLER

What you ask is wrong.

TENGNAGEL

According to scripture?

KEPLER

To hide what God reveals to us is surely a sin. To lie about who sees what God has written is still lying.

TYCHO

Tengnagel, fetch Kepler's bag.

(Tengnagel retrieves the bag and sets it at Kepler's feet.)

TYCHO

Have a pleasant journey. I'm sure your reception at Graz will be much colder than ours. And I'm sure the agreements that they will have you sign will be far more painful.

TENGNAGEL

Beware the bonfires, Kepler. I read your book, and you will make fine kindling.

KEPLER

I will go cautiously. Farewell.

(Kepler turns to go.)

TYCHO

Stubborn son-of-a-bitch.

KEPLER

Yes, I am.

TYCHO

Compromise?

KEPLER

If you have no use for me--

TYCHO

Yes, I have use for you. I also read your "Mysterium  
Cosmographicum."

KEPLER

Your favorite part?

TYCHO

The dedication, of course. What if we delete the part about  
credit? Whatever you find, belongs to your name. The rest  
stays--I'll not have you giving away my treasures.

KEPLER

May I publish, with your permission?

TYCHO

Of course.

TENGNAGEL

Tycho, why modify--

TYCHO

Quiet, Tegnagel.

(Tycho takes the pen and alters the  
agreement.)

TYCHO

More palatable now?

(Kepler reads and signs.)

TYCHO

Welcome aboard. We must celebrate! (screaming out) Where  
is the food! I am starving in my own house!!!

Junior, Elizabeth, CHRISTINE, and Jenter, carrying food and drink. All sit at the table and begin feasting.

TYCHO

Kepler, this is Christine, mother of my children, love of my life. This is my daughter, Elizabeth.

KEPLER

I'm honored to meet you.

CHRISTINE

He seems more apt to behave himself than the rest of you hooligans. (to Kepler) Do you intend to bring your family, Herr Kepler?

KEPLER

As soon as possible.

CHRISTINE

It'll be nice to have some decent company for a change. Someone who knows what it's like to try to raise a family, in addition to a ravenous horde of assistants.

TYCHO

A toast! To Johannes Kepler, our newest friend and workhorse. Ascend Mt. Olympus with me and we will strengthen the ceiling of heaven with sturdy new crossbeams.

(All raise their cups to drink and then look expectantly at Kepler. He finally realizes his obligation and holds his cup aloft.)

KEPLER

To Tycho Brahe, Imperial Mathematicus, most respected astronomer in the world, who opened his heart and hearth to me and my family when we were in our darkest hour, when despair seemed--

TENGNAGEL

I'm thirsty.

TYCHO

Quiet.

KEPLER

--when despair seemed our only possession. May we work together to create an edifice to God that satisfies our greatest aspirations.

JEP

Hear, hear!

(They all drink.)

JUNIOR

Father tells us you're quite the astrologer.

KEPLER

It pays the bills.

JUNIOR

I study the influence of the stars a little.

TYCHO

He's more interested in prophecy than astronomy.

TENGNAGEL

Junior's still trying to forecast when he'll first get laid.

CHRISTINE

Watch your mouth, Tegnagel.

KEPLER

We shouldn't be surprised when astrological foolishness sometimes yields something clever and holy. Out of the great heap of caterpillar dirt emerges a silk spinner.

TYCHO

The Emperor will want another silken horoscope soon. Maybe you can help me, Kepler. I'm sure he's heard of your book.

TENGNAGEL

Let's hope he didn't notice the obvious errors.

KEPLER

Errors?

TYCHO

Your adherence to Copernicus' model, for one.

TENGNAGEL

Maybe once you learn to work the instruments yourself, you'll be satisfied that the earth is the center of the universe.

TYCHO

The sun revolves around the earth, and all the other planets revolve around the sun. It makes perfect sense.

KEPLER

Not to me.

TYCHO

Where's the parallax?

TENGNAGEL

Yes, where's the parallax?

KEPLER

What if the stars are too far away?

TYCHO

Ridiculous. Our instruments are extremely accurate. If the earth revolves around the sun, we would detect shifts in the positions of the stars over the course of the year. We never have.

TENGNAGEL

Never.

TYCHO

I'll show you the observations myself.

KEPLER

I would like that.

TYCHO

Later. A toast, to the stars and the moon.

(They drink.)

KEPLER

The moon fascinates me. I try to imagine the creatures who live on the moon.

ELIZABETH

Creatures on the moon?

CHRISTINE

Herr Kepler, please don't fill their heads with more crazy thoughts. We need a positive influence around here.

TENGNAGEL

I hope you weren't planning to do calculations on the moon, Kepler. It's already mine.

ELIZABETH

Tengnagel is an expert on the moon. He's even written a poem about her.

TYCHO

I considered offering you the orbit of Mars, but it's too difficult. Maybe you can have Venus.

KEPLER

I'll take Mars.

TENGNAGEL

You'll be sorry.

JEP

Does a blind man weep when he sees his first sunrise?

KEPLER

The secrets of the universe lie in the orbit of Mars.

JUNIOR

Mars is an evil master, Kepler.

TYCHO

I'm short-handed as it is. I can't afford to lose you in the quicksands of Mars.

KEPLER

I'll solve it.

JUNIOR

The calculations are endless.

KEPLER

And I'll do it quickly.

TENGNAGEL

No one can do it in less than seven or eight years. If ever.

KEPLER

Give me eight days.

TYCHO

Eight days!

TENGNAGEL

Impossible.

KEPLER

I have several theories. I just need the numbers.

TYCHO

Don't embarrass yourself.

KEPLER

You all doubt me?

TENGNAGEL

You're not even serious.

KEPLER

Perhaps we should lay a wager?

TENGNAGEL

A keg of ale. The loser serves it to the winner, stein by stein. In a dress.

KEPLER

Agreed.

TYCHO

Kepler, you're a braggart and a fool. I like you better already.

KEPLER

Excuse me. I need some rest. Please send someone up with the data first thing in the morning.

(Kepler walks to his office, where he falls asleep on a cot.)

JUNIOR

He's crazy.

TENGNAGEL

Too much ego for my taste.

CHRISTINE

He seems to be a very earnest young man.

JEP

He's no coward.

ELIZABETH

What an imagination.

TENGNAGEL

Full of hot air.

TYCHO

He's not afraid of hard work. A quality I'd like to see more often around here. We just need to make sure he knows his place.

TENGNAGEL

We'll make sure he does.

JUNIOR

Father, since it's cloudy tonight, we thought perhaps... There's a party at Van Braun's estate.

TYCHO

Seeing that our guest of honor has deserted us, I suppose... Expect to work doubly hard now that Kepler's here.

ELIZABETH

They will work harder than ever, don't worry.

(Tengnagel, Junior, and Elizabeth exit together.)

(Christine clears the table.)

CHRISTINE

Don't be too hard on him, Tycho. He seems very sensitive.

TYCHO

I will be on my best behavior. As always. (he takes a pitcher from her) This can stay.

(Christine exits. Tycho and Jep keep drinking.)

TYCHO

(raising his glass) To the prospect of a sensitive young  
pain in the ass.

JEP

To his health and yours.

(They drink in silence for a while.)

TYCHO

I miss Hveen.

JEP

The damp, cold air? The wretched, bitching, whining  
peasants?

TYCHO

My own little island. History may never see such an  
observatory again.

JEP

Neither will you.

TYCHO

This empire is so damn crowded... Too many distractions, too  
many damn parties. (beat) People will remember me, Jep. The  
Tychonic model of the solar system. They will remember me.

JEP

Of course. They will remember him even more.

TYCHO

Even a genius can't do it in eight days, if ever. I spent a  
year trying to figure it out and where did I get? And he's  
no genius... He's a kid, with wild ideas and too much  
energy. Likely to get himself burned alive like Bruno if he  
keeps spouting off. Five solids. What rubbish.

JEP

He searches for diamonds in a haystack the size of the sky.

TYCHO

He's merely joined the rest of the seekers. He's no  
different from the rest of us.

JEP

You know better. Tell me about his book, Tycho.

TYCHO

I'm not going to be a squirming stepstool for that child.  
He'll help me. Me... I'm drunk.

JEP

And a master of subtlety.

TYCHO

Shut up and help me out of this chair.

(He places a heavy hand on Jep and uses  
him to help himself onto wobbly feet.  
They exit.)

SCENE 3

(Kepler scribbles furiously on sheets of  
paper, calculating. He's ecstatic.  
The air is filled with stars, or  
perhaps projections of planets and  
Euclidian solids can be used.)

KEPLER

Floating in empty space,  
twisting in every direction,  
hungry for my first true glimpse of Heaven,  
courtesy of Tycho's generosity.  
We join hands and pull each other  
Towards greatness.  
God has written his signature across the sky,  
a map leading us to comprehend  
the magnificence of his creation.  
The planets move in circles around the sun.  
Elegant simplicity.  
Imagine God fixing Earth in the center.  
God does not create ugliness in the sky.  
Five perfect solids.  
A glimmer of an answer.  
Six planets for the five solids.  
Mercury and Venus fit so wonderfully.  
Tiny steps towards comprehension,  
numbers falling into place.  
I will construct a platform  
with Tycho's numbers,  
supporting a hundred theories and ideas.  
If only Mars would cooperate.  
Eccentric circles.

Eccentric circles.  
All at the same speed. KEPLER(cont'd)  
(laughs) Aristotle had his shortcomings.  
God exists in change.  
The rhythm of transformation.  
Closer faster, farther slower.  
Why? Why? Why?  
Relationships.  
Mars does not fit.  
Break through, break through.  
I am ready, I am ready.  
Ask the question,  
never be afraid to ask  
Why?  
What are the relationships over time?  
How are we all linked?  
every flower,  
every rocky cliff,  
circling together,  
bound by the same laws,  
laws for nature,  
for man,  
for the heavens.  
God has placed an order  
for us to see.  
The brilliance of God's plan surrounds me.  
I can't make it all fit.  
I can't make them fit.  
More numbers. I need more numbers.  
Mars. Mars. Mars.  
Why?

SCENE 4

(Kepler at his desk, still working.  
Tycho enters and puts a hand on  
Kepler's shoulder.)

TYCHO

Your time is up.

KEPLER

Hello? What?

TYCHO

Eight days have passed.

KEPLER

(turning back to his work.) Thank you.

TYCHO

Do you have the equation for Mars?

KEPLER

Not yet.

TYCHO

Pick your head up. You're done for today. Here, eat something.

(He hands Kepler a plate of food and Kepler devours every morsel on it.)

TYCHO

Slow down. Slow down.

KEPLER

Sorry.

TYCHO

I wish Junior would work like that. I wish he could think like that.

KEPLER

Ptolemy said: "I know that I am mortal and ephemeral, but when I search the convolutions of the stars, my feet no longer touch the earth."

(Tycho hands him another plate of food.)

TYCHO

Did you uncover anything in your frenzy of calculations?

KEPLER

Mars is more complex than I thought.

TYCHO

Apparently the savant does not know everything.

KEPLER

I had a number of theories, but they don't agree with the data. Normally I would just shape the numbers to fit my hypothesis, but your information is too accurate. For the most part.

TYCHO

For the most part?

(Kepler points to various numbers on the sheets.)

KEPLER

Some of these are clearly off. A few minutes here, half a degree there. Didn't seem like your writing.

TYCHO

Tengnagel.

KEPLER

Not surprising. I have so many questions. Why does the speed vary? What's the shape of the orbit?

TYCHO

An eccentric circle, of course.

KEPLER

Why? It doesn't make sense.

TYCHO

Who are you to ask why? What if only God can make sense of the stars?

KEPLER

There is an order, placed there because He wants us to find it. Geometry, quantities, relationships... God made them first. The sky was only created on the second day.

TYCHO

So basically, in eight days all you've discovered are some erroneous readings.

KEPLER

Well... I discovered that you've been using the wrong position of the sun.

TYCHO

I know the position of the sun.

KEPLER

But in all your calculations, you use the average position.

TYCHO

Out of necessity.

KEPLER

The sun is a physical object in space. If you calculate your oppositions from the mean sun, your results can be off by five degrees.

TYCHO

Five degrees? That's a lie.

KEPLER

Look at the math.

TYCHO

Even your blessed Copernicus used the mean position of the sun.

KEPLER

We're no longer carving up great chunks of marble. We are creating the figure. Look at the numbers.

TYCHO

Let me see.

(Kepler hands papers to Tycho, who studies them angrily. Kepler goes back to his work until Tycho finishes, blustering.)

TYCHO

This... this...

KEPLER

You see that I'm right.

TYCHO

I see... You're right... But how should we make allowances for eccentricity?

KEPLER

If I had more data--

TYCHO

More data? What do you have?

(Kepler holds up a stack papers.)

KEPLER

You didn't give me much. Not nearly enough. I copied them over. You can have them back.

TYCHO

You copied them over? You copied them onto your own precious little data sheets? Where? Show them to me.

(Kepler does. Tycho grabs them and tears them up.)

TYCHO

I ought to throw you in the pond. I ought to string you up. Where's my sword!

KEPLER

What--

TYCHO

You are never to copy tables of data. I will give you what you need... no more, no less. These are MINE. Do you understand?

KEPLER

I do.

TYCHO

You'd better. Wait right here.

(Tycho exits and wheels in a strongbox. He removes a key from around his neck and opens the door. Inside is a large pile of papers. Tycho returns the data sheets to their proper spot in the pile. Kepler practically salivates at the sight of all the data.)

TYCHO

All the data you receive will come from here and be returned here each evening. I have the only key.

KEPLER

Those are all planetary observations?

TYCHO

You will make no copies.

KEPLER

You are the richest man I've ever met.

TYCHO

They're my riches.

KEPLER

Of course.

TYCHO

Let's not keep everyone waiting, your wager has come due.

(He leads Kepler to the dining room. Tengenagel, Junior, and Jep enter with steins and a pitcher of beer (or a keg). Tengenagel carries a dress.)

JUNIOR

Yoo-hoo.

TENGNAGEL

Frau Kepler!

(Tengenagel tosses the dress to Kepler.)

TENGNAGEL

I hope this fits.

(The others sit at the table.)

TENGNAGEL (cont'd)

We're ready for your dissertation, Kepler. I assume you wrote a lyric poem as well; you did have eight days. The whole world was created in six.

JEP

The confidence of Sampson. But before or after the shears, we shall see.

KEPLER

I was not able to solve Mars.

TENGNAGEL

What a shock.

JUNIOR

Put on the dress. Put it on.

JEP

Such a shame. It's Tengenagel's color.

KEPLER

What? No, I don't think so.

TENGNAGEL

You agreed. I will be served my keg by a beautiful young maiden. On with it.

(Kepler appeals to Tycho, who merely laughs. Kepler puts on the dress.)

TENGNAGEL

We've finally found a woman for Junior. Show us what you're made of, wench.

(Kepler does a little twirl and curtsy.)

KEPLER

Would you gentlemen care for something to drink?

TENGNAGEL

A stein. For me and for my friends.

(Kepler pours beer for all of them.)

JEP

A second career for the mathematician. For when times are hard.

TENGNAGEL

What are you doing after work, honey?

KEPLER

I will be looking for men not so ugly nor vile smelling.

JUNIOR

I prefer women with much smaller beards.

(Tengnagel lies on the table and tilts his head back.)

TENGNAGEL

Serve me, wench.

(Kepler pours a few swallows into Tengnagel's mouth, until he's signaled to stop. He resumes again, but this time dumps the whole stein all at once, dousing his victim. The others roar with laughter as Tengnagel chases Kepler around the table.)

TENGNAGEL

Come back here, you dog.

KEPLER

You'll drown in my shadow.

JUNIOR

Catch him!

JEP

A slight miscalculation?

TENGNAGEL

You made a mistake coming here at all.

KEPLER

The only one making mistakes is you. I would have needed a month to just count them all.

TENGNAGEL

What are you--

KEPLER

The sheets are full of them.

TENGNAGEL

Liar!

(He tackles Kepler. The others pull them apart.)

KEPLER

Brute force won't shift the stars, Tegnagel.

TENGNAGEL

No one falsely--

TYCHO

Quiet. I saw them myself.

JUNIOR

There's so many numbers, Tegnagel. It happens.

JEP

A number wrong here, a number wrong there, and suddenly a planet sitting in your lap.

TYCHO

We will have fewer errors in the future. Won't we, Tegnagel?

TENGNAGEL

Yes.

TYCHO

Junior will go over the last two years of notes and check each figure.

JUNIOR

But the observations--

TYCHO

During the day.

JUNIOR

You can't be serious. I have-- [riding and hunting]

KEPLER

I'll do it.

TYCHO

Junior will do it. No argument.

JUNIOR

But--

TYCHO

You heard me. A toast! To big heads and big mouths. There are plenty to go around tonight.

(They all drink.)

TYCHO

Enjoy those beers, Lads, because the sky is clear. We have work to do.

JUNIOR

What about our celebration?

TYCHO

The sheer joy and beauty of the sky shall be our celebration. Come on, let's go.

They trudge up to the observatory.  
Kepler removes the dress.

Reading the Mind of God/Gabridge p.29  
Tycho, Junior and Tengenagel twirl  
cranks and adjust sights with practiced  
skill.

TYCHO

Ready, Tengenagel?

TENGNAGEL

Yes, sir. Right sight set for Leo, Mars should appear at  
approximately twenty nine degrees.

TYCHO

Junior is plotting the constellation, Coma Berenices. Give  
him a hand, Kepler. Mars is risen; Tengenagel, what's the  
reading?

TENGNAGEL

Twenty nine degrees, eleven minutes, three seconds. Leo.

TYCHO

So noted. A longitude would be nice.

(He and Tengenagel hurry to make another  
observation. Kepler tries to help  
Junior with a large sextant (it has two  
arms that are each five and a half feet  
long and several large arcs), but he's  
clumsy.)

TYCHO

Shift to the right. More. Back. A little forward. There  
you go. (peers to read the dimly lit scale). Three degrees,  
twenty three minutes.

(Tengenagel writes down the number and  
reconfigures the machine for another  
observation.)

(Tycho watches Junior and Kepler.  
Junior holds the arms in position, and  
Kepler attempts a reading.)

JUNIOR

Come on, Kepler.

KEPLER

I'm having a little trouble.

JUNIOR

You see the Alpha and Beta stars I told you about, right?

KEPLER

Yes.

JUNIOR

It should be almost in line with Beta, maybe forty five minutes over.

KEPLER

It's... it's... very hard for me to make out.

TYCHO

Step back.

(He pushes Kepler away from the instruments.)

TYCHO

Back up. Back up.

(He pushes Kepler farther away, then shines a lantern on the instrument.)

TYCHO

What does this say?

KEPLER

It gives the longitude.

TYCHO

Read the numbers.

KEPLER

I can't quite make it out.

TYCHO

Take a step closer.

(Kepler tries to take two steps, but Tycho stops him.)

TYCHO

One step at a time. What does it say now?

KEPLER

The light is very dim.

TYCHO

Step forward until you can read the markings.

(Kepler does as he's told. He has to be very close to read the numbers. Everyone else watches.)

TENGNAGEL

He's practically blind.

TYCHO

See any stars up there, Kepler?

KEPLER

Of course.

TYCHO

Sirius, Arcturus, Vega?

KEPLER

Yes, I can see the brightest stars.

TYCHO

And the planets?

KEPLER

Always.

TYCHO

What good are you if you can only see blazing torches in the sky? We charted those decades ago.

KEPLER

I can see Mars. Let me record observations of Mars.

TYCHO

Get out of my sight, before I throw you off the roof. Go on.

(Kepler exits.)

TENGNAGEL

What use is a blind astronomer?

TYCHO

None.

JUNIOR

He has a quick mind.

TENGNAGEL

Don't we all?

JEP

Perhaps he can achieve on paper what--

TYCHO

I don't need more wild theories, I need more skilled hands and eyes. Come on, back to work. Junior, fetch me something to eat. The stars are shining for us this evening, for those of us with eyes.

SCENE 5

(Kepler at his desk.)

KEPLER

Wasting my time. I have a right to see the numbers, to use those instruments. Would he have my theories become dried husks, blowing in the wind of opinion. Ideas must be nurtured, fed, watered. I don't want to spend my time cooped up in here as a hired hand with nimble fingers. I need more data.

(Kepler crosses to the strongbox and caresses it.)

KEPLER

I need more data.

(He tugs at the door, but it's locked. He pries at it with his fingers. Finally, he sits on the floor in front of it and just stares.)

(Tycho enters and sees Kepler at the safe.)

TYCHO

What are you doing?

KEPLER

I can't solve the puzzle without all the pieces.

TYCHO

They're my--

KEPLER

Pieces. What do you plan to do with them?

TYCHO

I have a very fine collection of theories.

KEPLER

When will you publish them?

TYCHO

When the time is right.

KEPLER

Let me see what I can do with my own theories.

TYCHO

You want me to just give you the observations?

KEPLER

Yes. Please.

TYCHO

You're not ready.

KEPLER

How can you say that?

TYCHO

You still make too many assumptions. You're practically as careless as Tengenel, leaping over yourself to prove to the world how brilliant you are.

KEPLER

I work harder than anyone here.

TYCHO

I worked and played twice as hard when I was your age.

KEPLER

I'll improve, just--

TYCHO

Give you what you want? Fine. Here. Have a key of your own.

(Tycho reaches into his pocket and pulls out a large key.)

KEPLER

God in Heaven.

TYCHO

This way, maybe you'll stop pestering me.

KEPLER

I will, I promise.

TYCHO

We'll see.

(Tycho tosses the key to Kepler, who stares at it for a moment, then greedily tries shoving it into the lock on the safe. The key does not fit. Kepler tries even harder. Tycho laughs.)

KEPLER

It doesn't seem... to... fit.

TYCHO

You still need me, Kepler. Don't forget it.

(Tycho exits.)

(Kepler wanders back to his desk and tries to resume working.)

(Keys begin falling from above onto his desk. This continues throughout the rest of the scene.)

KEPLER

Concentrate. Earth moves. We move with it, watching Mars. What if you chart it from the surface of Mars. What's different? Why do the speeds vary? Keys. If a giant arm inscribes the orbits, what are the relationships of these areas over time? Can the area relate to the speed?

(Tengnagel and Junior enter, blindfolded, tapping long sticks loudly in front of them, as if they are blind men. They circle Kepler and his desk.)

JUNIOR

(to Tengenagel) Say, aren't you the famous ass-tronomer, Johannes Kepler?

TENGNAGEL

Indeed. I will reveal to you all the mysteries of the universe.

JUNIOR

I am eager to see.

TENGNAGEL

Aren't we all. If you observe the stars using my methods, you'll understand all my theories. I can prove them all.

JUNIOR

Explain to me, teacher.

TENGNAGEL

You see all those stars and planets up there, don't you?

JUNIOR

Perfectly.

TENGNAGEL

As do I. What a beautiful evening. There's Mars perfectly aligned with the Sun and Saturn.

JUNIOR

In opposition from Venus and Jupiter, circling each other.

TENGNAGEL

Oh, wait, there's the earth. It's so convenient to be here on the moon this evening.

JUNIOR

What a sight!

TENGNAGEL

No one knows it as well as me.

(They exit.)

KEPLER

Retrace each step, each calculation. Errors. Narrow my set of assumptions.

(Jep runs on.)

JEP

If there is a constant area of assumption, then does  
narrowing your assumptions increase the depth of your error?

(Jep runs off.)

(Tycho enters and sets an enormous stack  
of papers on Kepler's desk.)

TYCHO

More.

KEPLER

I've barely begun the others.

TYCHO

What are you waiting for?

KEPLER

They take time. What are they?

TYCHO

More divisions.

KEPLER

But of what? What planets, what stars?

TYCHO

These-- (holds up one sheet)

KEPLER

Yes?

TYCHO

Are of Mars.

KEPLER

And the others?

TYCHO

I need them by the end of the week.

(Tycho exits. Jep runs on.)

JEP

An astronomer, a plumber, and a farmer are walking down the road.

(Jep runs off.)

KEPLER

I... Think. Imagine. Spinning, does the spinning effect the rate? Why regression? God plays with loops in the sky. Backwards, forwards, why only Mars?

(Junior runs on with a notebook.)

JUNIOR

So, if she was born with the moon in Aries, and Mars in Leo--

KEPLER

I don't know.

JUNIOR

And Venus in Capricorn, and Saturn in Sagittarius, and Jupiter also in Capricorn... what exactly does that mean?

KEPLER

I don't know.

JUNIOR

Her mother says that she was born just before dawn.

KEPLER

Then she'll have a sunny disposition, especially towards over-eager sons of famous astronomers.

JUNIOR

That's what I was hoping you'd say. Imagine...

(Junior exits.)

(Christine enters.)

CHRISTINE

You were late for dinner. Again.

KEPLER

Sorry. I was--

CHRISTINE

You were late for breakfast.

KEPLER

Sorry, I was--

CHRISTINE

Don't make me drag you down for lunch.

KEPLER

I'm just trying to--

CHRISTINE

Can you help me with the accounts. The miller says we owe him money, but I'm sure he's lying.

KEPLER

I'm really trying to--

CHRISTINE

There was a letter for you.

KEPLER

From--

CHRISTINE

But it's lost. Can you help me find a new system for the pantry? Imagine.

(Christine exits.)

KEPLER

Imagine. Try to close my eyes and shut out the sound, drown the noise, see the darkness, lit only with the breath of God, sparkling against Heaven. A stellar frost.

(Tycho comes on with another stack of papers. Jep runs on.)

TYCHO

I need you to write these letters for me. I've attached a note to each one stating what it should contain.

JEP

What do these things have in common: A star, a planet, and a watermelon?

(Tycho and Jep exit.)

KEPLER

The face of the Mars conceals something. What lurks beneath the surface? The period of revolution. And the medium. Where is Mars? Where is Mars? I cannot think.

(The keys stop falling.)

Blackout.

SCENE 6 (FIVE MONTHS AFTER KEPLER'S ARRIVAL)

(Elizabeth and Kepler in his office.)

ELIZABETH

What about Mars?

KEPLER

A world of fiery deserts, seething with volcanoes.

ELIZABETH

A world of flame.

KEPLER

Yet the sky is dim, it's much farther from the sun.

ELIZABETH

And the creatures on Mars must be very different from those on the moon.

KEPLER

Oh, yes. Perhaps like giant lizards, or else very small to avoid the heat.

ELIZABETH

And they fear nothing.

KEPLER

Except eclipses, which mystify them.

ELIZABETH

Just like the people of Prague.

KEPLER

But with no astronomers to predict them. And what if Mars has more than one moon, and they have eclipses daily.

ELIZABETH

The whole of Prague is still talking about you. I wish I could have seen you in the Square.

KEPLER

A small observation and demonstration. You'd think they'd never seen a scientist before.

ELIZABETH

I wish I could think like you.

KEPLER

My thinking cost me dearly. A pickpocket stole my money while I was showing off my camera obscura.

ELIZABETH

Do you really think Mars could have moons? My friends write to me asking what it's like to share the house with a genius.

(Christine enters.)

CHRISTINE

Elizabeth, why are you bothering poor Johan?

KEPLER

She's no bother. At least I'm being disturbed by someone pure of heart.

ELIZABETH

We're imagining creatures on Mars.

CHRISTINE

You shouldn't fill her head with such nonsense.

ELIZABETH

I should go. Thank you, Johan.

KEPLER

My pleasure.

(Elizabeth exits.)

CHRISTINE

I know these past months have been hard for you.

KEPLER

It has been difficult to concentrate.

CHRISTINE

I have a new distraction. One I think you'll like.

KEPLER

I don't think I can stomach another.

CHRISTINE

Your wife and children are here.

KEPLER

What? What day is it today?

CHRISTINE

(calling out) Frau Kepler. (to Kepler) I'm sure you'll be much happier now.

(Christine exits. BARBARA KEPLER enters. She is short, dour, and carries a bible. She and Kepler greet each other with little warmth.)

KEPLER

Hello, Barbara. How was your trip?

BARBARA

I have a headache and a fever. (looks around the office) What a mess! It looks like you've been here five years, not five months.

KEPLER

Where are the children?

BARBARA

Outside, playing. This place is utter chaos. It's a wonder your health hasn't suffered.

KEPLER

Three times I was certain that I'd caught consumption. But there's no chaos in the observatory. You should see-- [Tycho's instruments.]

BARBARA

I'm certainly concerned about my health. I've been quite unwell since you left. I cough and wheeze and--

KEPLER

Any word from Graz?

BARBARA

(handing him some letters) Invitations. You're much more popular now that you're gone. For the average Lutheran, though, it keeps getting more dangerous.

KEPLER

It's good that you got out.

BARBARA

It's killing my parents. What are our rooms like? Drafty and cold, no doubt. You have prepared them for us, haven't you?

KEPLER

You... I... I lost track of time.

BARBARA

We've been traveling for two weeks, Johan.

KEPLER

We're having a banquet tonight in your honor. Christine has seen to everything.

BARBARA

You assured me that when I came to Prague I would associate with nobility. She's a peasant. (whispers) I heard they're not even married.

KEPLER

Barbara, you're a merchant's daughter, not spawn of the Emperor.

BARBARA

Try to be nice. I've had a very hard trip. Have you spoken to the Emperor about a proper salary?

KEPLER

Not yet.

BARBARA

We can't rely on charity forever. You sent him a copy of your book, didn't you?

KEPLER

Yes, but--

BARBARA

You told me it was impressive, that he would reward us.

KEPLER

He will.

BARBARA

I was not brought up to live in poverty, Johan.

KEPLER

I know. I know. Why don't you get settled? I'll be down in a minute.

(Barbara exits. Kepler resumes working.)

Scene 7

Kepler alone at his desk, darkness everywhere else, filled with stars.

KEPLER

I am lost.

(The other characters surround him, all in the dark.)

TYCHO

More calculations, Kepler.

TENGNAGEL

Help me clean the instruments, Kepler.

KEPLER

I listen for God's voice, but it is drowned in a sea of shouting.

JUNIOR

I can't get through these refractions.

BARBARA

Spend some time with us, Johan.

ELIZABETH

Don't you think Tegnagel is handsome?

BARBARA

Regina and I are reading selections from Deuteronomy this evening.

KEPLER

I look for His face in the stars, but I am blind.

BARBARA

You can't imagine what she said to me.

TYCHO

Stop daydreaming and do some work.

KEPLER

A million suns burn in the heavens.

TENGNAGEL

We need these by tomorrow.

TYCHO

Lighten up.

KEPLER

The planets revolve, constant, oblivious, patient.

JEP

Spinning, spinning, spinning.

KEPLER

The roadmap to His mind is laid out before me, and I'm not even looking in the right direction.

BARBARA

Johan.

TYCHO

Kepler.

CHRISTINE

Herr Kepler.

KEPLER

There are a small number of things that I know.

TENGNAGEL

Bastard.

JUNIOR

Kepler.

TYCHO

Copernicus is wrong.

TENGNAGEL

Idiot.

KEPLER

And will not compromise. I just want to understand. Why?

CHRISTINE

I wish you two wouldn't argue so.

TYCHO

Stop making wild assumptions.

KEPLER

Relationships are the key.

TENGNAGEL

The pond is awfully inviting this evening.

KEPLER

But perhaps they are not for me to see.

JUNIOR

Underpopulated.

CHRISTINE

Leave him alone.

KEPLER

Have I missed my true calling? Am I wasting my time?

TENGNAGEL

Blind!

TYCHO

Stop whining.

KEPLER

I need some peace!

Blackout.

SCENE 8

(Kepler working. He looks terrible, hair askew, he coughs and blows his nose constantly. Jep enters.)

JEP

You wanted to see me?

KEPLER

What? Oh, yes... You know Tycho as well as anyone. Maybe better.

JEP

My perspective may be unusual.

KEPLER

Why does he hate me?

JEP

He doesn't hate you.

KEPLER

At the very least he dislikes me. He acts like I'm a constant irritant, with all the affection one shows an oozing sore. He distracts me, belittles me, mocks me in front of members of the Court? Why? Why, why why?

JEP

Does the eclipsed moon relish her darkness?

KEPLER

He's had his chance to make history. I need his numbers. Now. I need peace and quiet. I am trying to accomplish important work, I am trying to think difficult thoughts.

JEP

He understands.

KEPLER

He doesn't act like it. I am a scientist, Jep. A scientist. I am a scientist. I am a scientist. Does that seem clear? I am a scientist. A scientist. Me. A scientist. A Thinker. Perfectly clear, yes?

JEP

Just relax.

KEPLER

I do not appreciate being treated like an idiot. Like an idiot. My head needs to be filled with the sky. Open. Open. But is it open? Is it open? IS IT OPEN? No, it is cluttered, cluttered with the junk he thrusts upon me. My mind is filled with Tycho's trash, Tycho's infernal, earthbound garbage.

JEP

Patience, Kepler. You're upset.

KEPLER

I'm more than upset. I'm distressed. I am under great stress. Strain. I feel the strain. My head hurts.

JEP

Mankind counts on you for illumination.

KEPLER

Tycho keeps trying to blow out my candle.

JEP

All that wind is merely vapor--it hides a deeper truth. Look for him beyond the surface, and you will see that he understands you.

KEPLER

He is not capable of understanding.

JEP

Don't underestimate him.

KEPLER

He's a bully. Bully, bully, bully, bully. My head throbs. There is never a moment of peace, Jep. Shhh. Can you hear the world cracking and groaning?

JEP

I don't hear anything. Kepler, maybe if you--

KEPLER

Exactly. Exactly. That's why you're here. I need your help. I need your help, Jep. I have written a letter to Tycho.

(He hands Jep a long letter.)

JEP

It's extremely detailed.

KEPLER

I didn't want to leave anything out.

JEP

You didn't.

KEPLER

I need my own apartment. It's too noisy here. My nerves are shot. Barbara complains of a new pain every day.

JEP

What do you want me to do with this?

KEPLER

Offer some suggestions, to make it palatable to him.

JEP

I'll try.

KEPLER

You're a good friend, Jep. Maybe you could even broach some of the subjects to him. Casually. Casually. Don't show him this. This is just an angry first draft.

JEP

I'll see what I can do. You really don't look well, Kepler. You should get some rest.

KEPLER

I am never well, lately. Thanks to Tycho. But there is work to be done. Work to be done.

(Jep exits. Kepler returns to his calculations.)

KEPLER

Work to be done. To be done. To be done. Work. Work to be done.

(Barbara appears in a spotlight. Kepler does not look up.)

BARBARA

(the words spilling out in a torrent) Johan, you must speak to Christine. They won't give me any cloth. I need to make new clothes for the girls, they're living in rags. And that is the least of my concerns about the children. The things that they are exposed to in this house, the immorality. Coarse language, debauchery, sorcery. Some say Tycho is a sorcerer. He is certainly a buffoon. Loud. Why is everyone in this house so loud? And why are they especially loud when we're reading our prayer service? They're heathens, Johan. Heathens. And that Jep, well he just frightens me. What can you expect when the house is headed by an unmarried couple.

Reading the Mind of God/Gabridge p.49

Sinful! That Christine, I'm sure she seems nice to you. She likes you. But she's controlling with me. Rude. I should not have to suffer so. Why did we come here? I want to go back to Graz, Johan. This country is filled with disease. The Plague has killed thousands in Prague. Filth. They wallow in filth. I have developed an ache in my back. I can barely stand. We need a new mattress. Ours is so worn, we might as well sleep on bare wood. Are you listening to me, Johan? Are you listening to me? I want to go home. Do you hear me?

KEPLER

Dance with me, Barbara.

BARBARA

You don't like to dance.

(Kepler closes his eyes, rocking in his seat, still not looking at her.  
Barbara seems alarmed.)

BARBARA

Johan. Johan. You're making me dizzy.

KEPLER

Isn't it wonderful?

BARBARA

No. Stop it this instant.

(Kepler stops.)

BARBARA

I'm worried about you.

KEPLER

Good. Then go away and LET ME WORK. You are up here every hour on the hour with a new list of complaints and aches and pains. I am trying to get some work done.

BARBARA

I complain because my life is full of problems.

KEPLER

And you are one of mine. You are part of a giant conspiracy keeping me from accomplishing a single important piece of work. I am searching. Searching, searching, searching, searching. I must do my work. Give me some peace!

BARBARA

Johannes Kepler, God gave me a great trial by having me marry you.

(She runs off.)

(Tycho marches up to Kepler carrying the letter. Jep is at his heels, trying to snatch the papers away.)

TYCHO

What is the meaning of this?!

KEPLER

What is the meaning of what?

TYCHO

This disrespectful, vile, hateful letter.

KEPLER

Jep!

JEP

I didn't mean to--

TYCHO

Did you write this incredible insult?

KEPLER

It was not meant to be read by you.

JEP

I was just trying to explain--

TYCHO

(reading) "You must allow me to choose the time and subject of my work. You must not ask me to perform trivial tasks." Who runs this household?

KEPLER

I am not an employee. I am your collaborator.

TYCHO

Who feeds your family? Who provides every penny you spend on paper and new clothes and firewood? Am I a charity worker?

KEPLER

If you believe my work to be worthless--

TYCHO

And this--"I am not in need of a spur but rather of a brake to prevent the threat of galloping consumption due to overwork." Don't we constantly invite you to relax with us?

KEPLER

Drinking until I throw up is not relaxing.

TYCHO

You act like we're a barbarian horde. What's this about your own private apartment. Are you too good to associate with my family?

KEPLER

I need quiet so I can think.

TYCHO

The rest of us manage to think. Or are your thoughts so much loftier that you require special conditions?

KEPLER

You know they are.

TYCHO

What I know is that you've asked to be pampered from the instant you arrived. Everyone is to be quiet when you're trying to read, your room is too drafty, you demand medicine for your galloping case of hypochondria.

KEPLER

Don't blame my string of illnesses on me. Blame it on the barbarians who continually toss me into the fish pond. Why did you leave Hveen? Because you were such a pain in the ass that the whole of Denmark couldn't stand to have you around anymore. Why are there no other scientists here? Because you treat them like dirt. You're so busy being dwarfed by your own ego that you haven't had an original thought in twenty years.

TYCHO

You arrogant piece of intellectual trash. If you plan to sulk around here until you can steal my observations, or until I die, you're out of luck. This is my house, given to me by the Emperor himself. My work is valued far above your no-name babblings. Why don't you pile your gear into the street and see who will toss a pfennig in your general direction. You are nothing. Son of a witch and a mercenary. Worthless crackpot. Worthless.

KEPLER

I'm gone. We're gone. Fine, fine, fine, fine, fine, fine,  
fine, fine, fine.

(Kepler starts ripping up papers and  
tossing the shreds into the air. He's  
completely out of his head, dancing  
around the room, shouting, ripping up  
papers.)

KEPLER

I'm finished. Finished listening to you. Finished.  
Finished. No more bellowing. No more shouting. Silence.  
Silent space. Stars all around. Spinning, spinning,  
spinning.

(Tycho and Jep stare.)

TYCHO

(whispering) What's happened?

JEP

I don't know.

KEPLER

No more, no more circles. No more circles. Ellipses,  
diamonds, forwards, backwards. White star, red star, black  
star, sucking up everything, energy, thoughts, dreams,  
imaginings. Skies spinning all around. Moon Mars Saturn  
Jupiter. Here I come. Voyage. Shhhhh. Quiet. We all must  
have quiet. Crash!!! Solids crashing, spheres breaking,  
orbits engulfed in ashes.

TYCHO

Close the door. Don't let anyone in.

(Kepler continues shouting and tossing  
ripped papers into the air.)

END OF ACT I.

GRAZ AND PRAGUE, 1601

SCENE 1: GRAZ

(Shreds of ripped papers, fluttering in the air.)

(Lights up on Kepler, dancing with the strong box.)

KEPLER

We are star-crossed lovers. The longing of my heart covers the miles instantly. I can imagine you, resting in my hands. I can almost read your numbers, if I stand still long enough. Stop breathing. My mind caresses your figures, lovingly.

(Two well-dressed women wearing masks join in the dance. Sounds of a party.)

KEPLER (cont'd)

If only my touch could open your door, and I could gaze inside at the wonders of Heaven. But it is not for me.

LENA

Herr Kepler, where are you?

(The strongbox suddenly rolls off stage.)

GRETCHEN

Lost in the stars.

KEPLER

No, I'm here.

LENA

I can't think of a better place to recover your health.

GRETCHEN

Graz is so beautiful this time of year.

LENA

We will not allow you to lift a finger.

GRETCHEN

You are the most requested person at parties and you've just arrived.

LENA

Dance with me.

GRETCHEN

Dance with me.

(He dances with them, awkwardly. Karl enters and sits on a stool, with a large notebook in his lap. The women never see him.)

KARL

Number seven hundred forty three.

LENA

I've heard that the Archduke admires your work intensely.

KEPLER

I'm hoping for a position in the court.

GRETCHEN

What about Prague?

KARL

Number seven hundred forty three.

KEPLER

Prague is very noisy. Very hard to concentrate.

GRETCHEN

It's so quiet here.

LENA

Recite a poem for me, Herr Kepler.

GRETCHEN

An ode to the Heavens.

KEPLER

It was so hard to get any work done. Even to think.

KARL

Number seven hundred forty three, step forward. We don't have all day.

The sound of polite society laughter, gradually growing louder.

Kepler stops dancing. The women whirl around him.

GRETCHEN

We have everything you need right here.

LENA

Everything you need.

(The strong box glides across the stage and off the other side.)

GRETCHEN

Please, don't get up. Rest. You must be well-rested for the party tonight.

LENA

You work so hard thinking great thoughts.

GRETCHEN

I wish my husband thought as much as you, he's always so busy being useful.

KARL

Name?

KEPLER

Johannes Kepler.

(The women produce fans and begin rapidly fanning Kepler's face.)

LENA

I've never heard of anything so horrible.

GRETCHEN

Threats at a party.

LENA

The people of Graz are so unsophisticated. I'm so embarrassed.

GRETCHEN

Don't worry, they're all talk.

KEPLER

Three months in Graz and I haven't done a single computation.

GRETCHEN

How wonderful. They must hurt your head.

LENA

You look so fit, so well-rested.

KARL

Kepler, eh? You're a stubborn man.

KEPLER

It can be a very useful quality.

KARL

Not today.

KEPLER

The Archduke does not want to expel me.

KARL

No exceptions this time.

GRETCHEN

Tycho must be a very great man.

LENA

To be so favored by the Emperor. More tea?

KEPLER

I never thought I'd miss the sound of his shouting.

GRETCHEN

More tea?

KARL

As you are aware, Archduke Frederick has ordered the expulsion of all heretics, especially Lutherans, from his dominions by the end of next week. Any that remain are to be instantly put to death.

LENA

I'm sorry, but we're renovating the guest room. Perhaps Gretchen has room for you.

KEPLER

I understand.

GRETCHEN

I'm so sorry, but perhaps Anna will have room for you.

KARL

(he's already said this 742 times) Anyone wishing to convert is welcome to stay. Will you agree to worship the one true and almighty God in the manner set forth by Him through His Son to the Apostle Peter? Will you agree to attend communion and confession regularly, as properly administered by a Roman Catholic Priest? Will you believe in the transubstantiation of the Eucharist?

KEPLER

No, I will not.

KARL

The penalty for your stubbornness is exile.

GRETCHEN

I don't know how things got so out of control.

LENA

All this chaos. Such a shame about Herr Kepler. More tea, Gretchen?

(The women exit.)

KARL

Why lose everything, Kepler?

KEPLER

I will be more comfortable if I submit, but my soul would stumble onto the rack. If exile is the price for my integrity, then so be it.

(Karl hands Kepler a piece of paper.)

KARL

This is your expulsion order. You have one week remove your possessions and family. Wait in that line with the other forty heretics.

(Kepler takes his slip of paper and tears it up.)

KARL

Number seven hundred forty four. Seven hundred forty four.

SCENE 2: BENATEK CASTLE

(Tycho and Junior in the observatory,  
working by lantern light. Jep  
watches.)

TYCHO

Pick up the pace, Junior. I want to get all the planets  
tonight, plus at least half a dozen new stars.

JUNIOR

Why?

TYCHO

Because it's important.

JUNIOR

To who?

TYCHO

To me. To everyone. To the future of science and  
navigation. I want to make it to an even thousand stars  
before I go to the Emperor.

JUNIOR

As you wish.

TYCHO

Where's that damn Tegnagel?

JUNIOR

Elizabeth wanted him for something.

TYCHO

He's supposed to be working. She's already got him wrapped  
around her finger. I don't have time for this... Seven  
degrees, thirteen minutes.

JUNIOR

So noted.

TYCHO

I've been abandoned. I show a little kindness, compassion...  
Never a word of thanks. How long does it take to recover  
one's health after going loony? He seemed fine the next day,  
if you ask me. Wants to see if he can find a sweeter ass to  
kiss.

JEP

I'm sure he'll fail.

TYCHO

Damn right he'll fail. He needs me. He's not going to find satisfaction in stinking Styria.

JUNIOR

Maybe he just needs a break. I can understand that.

JEP

Perhaps all he seeks is a fine glass of ale accompanied by a few moments of silence.

TYCHO

He can have all the ale and silence he wants right here. We'll never speak to him again, if that's what he wants. Junior will stop pestering him with stupid astrology quizzes.

JUNIOR

They're not stupid.

TYCHO

If a man can't stomach a little rubbish, what good is he? Science features a great many people who are completely full of horse shit.

(Tengnagel enters.)

TYCHO

Where the hell have you been?

TENGNAGEL

Elizabeth--

TYCHO

Next time she wants to drag you away from observations, tell her to come to me first. All you've been doing for the past three months is slouching around. All of you.

TENGNAGEL

We've been working harder than ever.

JUNIOR

Much harder.

TYCHO

Bah. Maybe you need the firecracker of competition placed in your drawers again, Tegnagel. You were a lot more lively when Kepler was here.

JEP

And a lot more disagreeable.

TENGNAGEL

Who asked you?

JEP

I retract my statement. Equally disagreeable.

JUNIOR

I'll tell you who's been in a sour mood.

TYCHO

My daughter should marry a man with prospects.

TENGNAGEL

My family--

TYCHO

I mean the prospect of achieving something, of making a mark on history. Look at you. I spend every evening with three mental midgets. A professional fool. My son, who longs only for fun and games. And you, I know where your mind has been. And it's not in the stars.

TENGNAGEL

I spend plenty of time on the stars.

TYCHO

When I look at my daughter, I see that your focus has been less than complete.

TENGNAGEL

I work every night by your side. I've helped you with every new theory. I spend my spare time formulating my own ideas.

TYCHO

And what have you discovered? Have you removed even a drop from the immense sea of ignorance that surrounds us? You haven't even placed a hand into water.

JUNIOR

We're doing our best.

TYCHO

That's what's most pathetic of all. You're doing your best. You perform the calculations ten times slower. You make mistakes. Your minds do not extend beyond what you've already thought ten thousand times before. Your eyes see no farther than the tips of your noses. Is he truly the nearsighted one?

JEP

Welcome to the world of wisdom, Master.

TYCHO

Quiet. I haven't tossed anyone into the pond for weeks, and you're-- [tops on my list]

JEP

My lips are sealed.

TENGNAGEL

Kepler was nothing but trouble. He drove all of us crazy.

TYCHO

Maybe we need some craziness.

TENGNAGEL

Whining, complaining. He's abnormal. Always in a daydream. I can't wait until he sends for his family and they're gone from our lives forever.

JUNIOR

Come on, Father. Let's chart the sky.

TYCHO

You two go ahead. I need some air. No slacking.

(Tycho walks away and paces. Jep runs off and brings back a beer for him. Tegnagel and Junior seem in no hurry to work.)

TYCHO

Thank you.

JEP

It will not quench the flames. You feel the heat of mortality burning in your soul.

TYCHO

Bah. I'm pickling myself, Jep. I'll live forever.

JEP

You should be praying to see the next generation of Brahes.

TYCHO

God and I are on excellent terms already. He has shown me a thousand wonders.

JEP

But not His Plan.

TYCHO

We still have unfinished business.

JEP

There may not be time for you to finish it. Or you may not have the capacity. Perhaps God is eager for your presence.

TYCHO

What do you know about it? (squirming, clearly uncomfortable) Pain is merely a stumbling block. More beer. My heirs are sitting in my observatory, cursing my foul temper.

JEP

As they should... (beat) I saw you at his desk.

TYCHO

He left most of his notes behind. A half-finished book on light. Light. What a dreamer. He's lucky he even can speak comprehensibly with all the words he creates. Diopter. Gravity. Rambling on and on about relationships. He's fishing. He guesses. He dreams. I don't pay him to daydream.

JEP

Very valuable dreams.

TYCHO

What will they get me?

JEP

Nothing.

TYCHO

Exactly.

JEP

Except for a lasting legacy, a place in history.

TYCHO

I already have that.

JEP

Then you have nothing to fear.

TYCHO

I don't fear that scrawny pencil-pusher.

JEP

Then make friends with him.

TYCHO

What more can I do? I already shelter him, feed him, care for his family.

JEP

Share with him, accept him.

TYCHO

I'm more than generous.

JEP

You are a stellar miser.

TYCHO

I will not listen to you. You dish out pearls of nothingness. I should have left you in Hveen.

JEP

And perhaps I should never have gone there to begin with. Then you would be dead, and my life would be peaceful.

TYCHO

And far less entertaining, not to mention bereft of beer... I scared him away, Jep. I took that overgrown melon of his and battered it senseless.

JEP

He'll be back.

TYCHO

I hope so.

SCENE 3: BENATEK CASTLE, SEVERAL WEEKS LATER.

(Sounds of merrymaking. Elizabeth waddles on in her wedding dress--she's almost eight months pregnant. Christine follows right behind her.)

ELIZABETH

I don't want to talk about it.

CHRISTINE

Elizabeth, you can't just leave in the middle of your wedding.

ELIZABETH

I want a divorce. He's a complete and total idiot. And I look like an elephant.

CHRISTINE

You're beautiful.

(Barbara Kepler enters. She carries a small wrapped package.)

BARBARA

Is she all right?

CHRISTINE

She's fine. Just a little overexcited.

ELIZABETH

I am not.

(Barbara hands her the package.)

BARBARA

This is for you and Tengnagel. In honor of your wedding and the child. It might make you feel better.

(Elizabeth quickly opens it.)

ELIZABETH

A Bible.

CHRISTINE

That's very kind, Barbara.

BARBARA

I marked a few passages that might be useful.

(Tycho drags Tengnagel in by his collar.  
Jep follows.)

TYCHO

Where's my daughter?

CHRISTINE

Tycho, what are you doing?

TENGNAGEL

Let me go.

TYCHO

I heard that this scoundrel offended my daughter on her  
wedding day.

ELIZABETH

Daddy, let him go.

TYCHO

(to Tengnagel) What say you, hound?

TENGNAGEL

I didn't do anything.

ELIZABETH

He was flirting with the Vice Chancellor's widow.

JUNIOR

Any luck?

TENGNAGEL

I wasn't. I swear.

TYCHO

Apologize to my daughter.

TENGNAGEL

But I--

TYCHO

Now!

TENGNAGEL

I'm sorry, Elizabeth. You know I love you more than the world. You're the only one I see in this whole castle. I would rather pluck out my own eyes than hurt you in any way.

ELIZABETH

That won't be necessary.

TENGNAGEL

Every other woman is a wrinkled old hag, when compared even to your shadow.

TYCHO

You're getting the hang of it.

CHRISTINE

Leave them alone.

TENGNAGEL

Please forgive me, even for the appearance of an insult.

ELIZABETH

I'll think about it.

(They kiss. Again.)

TYCHO

I'm so happy that they're in love again.

JEP

The sun has reentered his orbit.

(Kepler enters, carrying his threadbare traveling bag. Tycho greets him with open arms.)

TYCHO

Kepler!

CHRISTINE

You're just in time.

TENGNAGEL

Yes, lucky us.

KEPLER

Hello, everyone.

ELIZABETH

I'm so glad you're here. Come, you must dance with me.

TENGNAGEL

Elizabeth. He just arrived, I'm sure he's very tired.  
Aren't you, Kepler?

JUNIOR

Thank God you're back. We've been suffering under the lash.

JEP

Nice that you were able to cram your wits back into your  
head.

KEPLER

Amazing that they fit, isn't it? I'm happy to see you all.

ELIZABETH

Come delight our guests with stories of your travels.

TENGNAGEL

Been to the moon lately?

KEPLER

I've been far too earthbound, I'm sorry to say.

BARBARA

Hello, Johan. What news from Graz?

KEPLER

I have been exiled.

BARBARA

Exiled?

ELIZABETH

That's horrible.

CHRISTINE

You're always welcome here.

KEPLER

I'm sorry, Barbara.

BARBARA

What about my parents?

KEPLER

They have become very good Catholics.

BARBARA

God will protect them.

"Thou dost bless the righteous man, O Lord,  
and surround him with favor as with a shield."

((Psalm 5, 11-12))

TYCHO

It's not the end of the world, eh?

CHRISTINE

As long as they're safe.

TYCHO

And the best and only center for planetary observations is  
right here, above our heads. You're better off.

BARBARA

I'm sorry if I see more to life than the stars.

(She exits.)

CHRISTINE

Poor dear. I'll go. The rest of you, get back to the party.  
Everyone will think we've abandoned them. Tycho, can't you  
ever learn when to say the right word?

(Christine exits.)

TYCHO

What did I say?

ELIZABETH

She'll be all right. You must promise to dance with me,  
Johan.

KEPLER

I promise.

JUNIOR

Think the widow Curtius is still feeling lonely?

TENGNAGEL

Shut up.

JUNIOR

My horoscope said tonight should be very lucky for me.

ELIZABETH

(to Tengenagel) You keep your eyes off her.

(Tengenagel, Junior, and Elizabeth return  
to the party.)

KEPLER

Sorry to interrupt the wedding.

TYCHO

Don't be. I love parties, but I can't wait until this  
foolishness is ended and we can do some work.

JEP

Tengenagel will be lost in wedded bliss. Don't count on much  
from him.

KEPLER

Do we ever?

TYCHO

Well said. So... How are you?

KEPLER

I'm well.

TYCHO

You look good. Doesn't he look good, Jep?

JEP

Radiant.

TYCHO

How do you feel?

KEPLER

Fine.

TYCHO

I mean... do you feel... are you...

KEPLER

Sane?

TYCHO

Yes.

KEPLER

Perfectly.

TYCHO

I'll try not to... put too much pressure on you. At least at first.

KEPLER

I'm fine. Really. You can be your usual self. I don't mind.

TYCHO

I just...

KEPLER

I apologize for my behavior.

TYCHO

Don't obsess about it. Make it up to me through work.

KEPLER

I will. I promise to control myself in the future.

TYCHO

I may also need to shoulder a small amount of blame.

JEP

Such large shoulders can surely support a large amount.

KEPLER

If you notice me slipping into my old habits, remind me at once, and I will correct myself immediately. You will have no more blind rages or insolence from me. I will be much more cooperative.

TYCHO

We will work together like new friends.

KEPLER

Amen.

TYCHO

Have a drink with me. When the party's over, you might want to look through some things I've left on your desk. A new sheet of Mars data. And a small new project.

KEPLER

Mars?

TYCHO

Not quite yet. Something very important though.

JEP

For certain eyes. Those with minds need not apply.

KEPLER

And the project is...?

TYCHO

Now is not the time for work. My daughter is marrying a man of small intellectual ability. Come, help me drown my sorrows.

JEP

You may wish to drown him instead.

KEPLER

I'm eager to begin such an important project. One that's more vital than the orbit of Mars.

TYCHO

It's nothing, really... I want you to write "The Defense of Tycho Against Ursus."

KEPLER

You're joking.

TYCHO

I will not risk him getting credit for my system.

KEPLER

Ursus died three months ago.

TYCHO

I don't care how much he's suffering in Hell. I want the record set straight on Earth.

KEPLER

You can't expect me to spend my time on this.

TYCHO

It's a trifle.

KEPLER

You assured me we would work as equals.

TYCHO

I would do the same for you, without hesitation.

KEPLER

This is an insult.

TYCHO

Asking a favor from a friend is an insult?

KEPLER

Why don't you just spit in my face? Why don't you burn my books in front of me? What better way can you tell me my mind is of no value.

TYCHO

Stay calm. Don't tax yourself.

KEPLER

I'm perfectly calm.

TYCHO

Once you complete the assignment, we can explore my observations.

KEPLER

I did not return to waste more time.

TYCHO

There are hundreds of Mars observations you haven't seen.

KEPLER

Have someone else write this idiocy.

TYCHO

It'll have more weight if it comes from you. You're developing a reputation as a first-class thinker.

KEPLER

A reputation I'll lose if I spout off about something as trivial as this.

TYCHO

So you decide to be agreeable only when it suits you. Your whole apology was empty? "I will be much more cooperative."

KEPLER

Cooperation is not slavery.

TYCHO

Is that what you think of me? A slave master?

JEP

Kepler, the sail must use the wind, not fight it.

KEPLER

Fine. Fine. Fine. I'll do what you ask.

TYCHO

Try not to pout too much.

KEPLER

Something must change, Tycho.

(Kepler exits--not to party.)

TYCHO

Oh, yes, I'm so happy our man-child has returned.

JEP

He can spin your life's work into gossamer webs of understanding.

TYCHO

He is MY assistant, I am not his. Everyone here needs to remember, I am the center of your orbits. I. Come, let us suffer my daughter's wedding! Where is the ale!

(They exit.)

#### SCENE 4

(Kepler's Office. Kepler working at his desk.)

KEPLER

If Ursus was alive now, I would kill him myself, in retribution for giving Tycho another way to waste my time.

(He crumples papers and tosses them.)

KEPLER

Three weeks of drudgery, three more weeks of my feet firmly bound to the surface of the earth.

(The other characters here will be merely voices, until noted)

TYCHO

Have you finished, Kepler?

KEPLER

Ursus shall return to the trash heap.

TENGNAGEL

Enjoying your new assignment, Kepler? I'm glad I suggested it.

KEPLER

I have become the bear myself, wandering through the night, searching for scraps of observations carelessly left behind.

BARBARA

I want to go home, Johan. How could you allow us to be exiled? How could you?

KEPLER

Tycho is the dispenser of madness.

TYCHO

Where are the lunar calculations?

KEPLER

Patience. I have patience. There is silence to be found, somewhere. Look to the future.

(Kepler produces several sheets of paper and sneaks up to the observatory.)

KEPLER

My collection of discarded numbers. My tether to sanity; a small, creaking bridge to the Heavens. Where the shouting voices do not follow. Together we wander the universe, the numbers and I... The stars are beautiful this evening.

(Kepler stares at the stars.)

(Elizabeth enters, still very pregnant. Kepler quickly puts down the papers.)

ELIZABETH

You're still awake.

KEPLER

I'm... I was... I was admiring the sky.

ELIZABETH

What do you see?

KEPLER

The stars, the planets, and the future. There is so much for Man to learn. The sky is full of possibility.

ELIZABETH

At least you have the chance to be part of it. You will be part of history, of science, forever.

KEPLER

Some day man will stand on the moon, Elizabeth.

(She looks at the sky.)

ELIZABETH

Because we can imagine it.

KEPLER

Exactly. God has already given us all the answers to the universe--if we are willing to look, to listen, to imagine. (beat) What do you see?

ELIZABETH

The frozen beauty of the stars. Perfection. There's so little in our lives that is perfect, but if we just remember to look up at the sky...

KEPLER

Yes. If we remember to step back and look for beauty... The sky is in perfect motion, it only appears to be still. The stars and planets glide through the heavens at impossible speeds, dancing and singing to God's celestial song.

ELIZABETH

You can hear it, can't you?

KEPLER

Yes. Despite everything, I hear it.

ELIZABETH

We see stillness, and you see whirling grandeur. Sometimes I feel so limited.

KEPLER

Open your mind. More than anyone in this house, you have the power to see.

ELIZABETH

I try. I try. (beat) You never danced with me at the wedding.

KEPLER

I had a few words with your father. And Tegnagel didn't seem to like--

ELIZABETH

Dance with me now. Dance with me to the sounds of the heavens.

KEPLER

I'm not much of a dancer.

ELIZABETH

Please.

(He takes her hands and they begin to move. Kepler closes his eyes, perhaps he hums lightly.)

KEPLER

Close your eyes. (she does) Picture the stars, fiery balls of flame, planets, great chunks of rock, gliding. Gliding. All in harmony.

(They are dancing, slowly, smoothly. She opens her eyes, watches him, then kisses him. He stops dancing and opens his eyes, startled.)

ELIZABETH

I'm sorry. I shouldn't have done that. I'm sorry. It's late. I have to go. Good night.

(She exits quickly. Kepler watches her go.)

(Tegnagel enters.)

TENGNAGEL

What was she doing here?

KEPLER

Admiring the stars. Have you forgotten how beautiful they are?

TENGNAGEL

I haven't forgotten how beautiful she is. Stay away from her.

KEPLER

Purge your mind of suspicion, Tegnagel. We merely admired the heavens. Elizabeth still has the capacity for wonder. You are a lucky man.

TENGNAGEL

I used to be.

KEPLER

The only one that has done mischief to her is you.

TENGNAGEL

She loves me. And I love her.

KEPLER

My blessings to you both.

TENGNAGEL

Our inheritance shall turn you into a greater beggar than you already are.

KEPLER

Tycho is not a complete idiot. He may as well reduce his life's work to ashes as give the observations to you.

TENGNAGEL

I have proved myself to him time and time again, for years. Years. I have earned--

KEPLER

I can prove more in ten minutes.

TENGNAGEL

He is not well. Everyone can see it. And when the time comes to weigh a decision, your ten minutes may not feel so heavy.

KEPLER

Your capacity for self-delusion is remarkable, Tengenagel. If only your other mental abilities were so far advanced.

TENGNAGEL

Stay out of my way. I will allow you to take nothing of mine. (walks to Kepler's desk) Return to Ursus, I must have a talk with Elizabeth.

(Tengenagel sees Kepler's observation sheets and grabs them.)

TENGNAGEL

What have we here? Perhaps your second expulsion order.

KEPLER

Give them to me. They are nothing. They are nothing.

TENGNAGEL

Tycho will not agree.

(They wrestle for them. Kepler eludes Tengenagel's grasp and tears the sheets to shreds. Tengenagel brushes himself off, Kepler lies on the floor with the shreds of paper, staring at them.)

TENGNAGEL

Now they are nothing.

(Tengenagel quickly searches Kepler's desk, but finds nothing incriminating. Kepler plays with torn pieces of his papers.)

TENGNAGEL

I will be watching you, Kepler.

(Tengenagel exits.)

KEPLER

Spinning, spinning, spinning, spinning, spinning.

SCENE 5:

(A loud CRY of a baby.)

(Tycho and Junior in the observatory,  
observing with a lit candle or lantern.  
Junior struggles to stay awake.)

TYCHO

Ready for Mars?

JUNIOR

Ready.

(Tycho fiddles with the instrument.)

TYCHO

Twenty nine degrees, twelve and one half minutes, Cancer.

JUNIOR

Huh?

TYCHO

Twenty nine degrees, twelve and one half minutes, Cancer.  
Pay attention, Junior.

JUNIOR

Sorry.

TYCHO

What a sight. I wish I could live a thousand years, just so  
I could admire the stars every night.

(Tycho moves to another instrument.  
Junior is sound asleep at the log  
book.)

TYCHO

Damn Tegnagel and his stupid excuses. If he thinks he'll  
inherit my observations just because he sleeps with my  
daughter... This is a project for the real Brahe men. Who  
needs a son-in-law when I already have a son. Latitude of  
Mars is... three degrees, twenty three minutes, North. Got  
that? Junior? Junior!

(He shakes Junior awake.)

TYCHO (cont'd)

Wake up!

JUNIOR

Leave me alone.

TYCHO

What's the matter with you?

JUNIOR

I'm exhausted.

TYCHO

I'm doing all the work. All you have to do is prop your lids open and work the pen.

JUNIOR

We've observed every night since the wedding. Every day you make me calculate refractions, scale corrections. I haven't slept in a month.

TYCHO

We've never been this short-handed before.

JUNIOR

I haven't been to a party in weeks. My horse has forgotten me.

TYCHO

We're recording the workings of the universe. It's a little more important than hunting and socializing.

JUNIOR

To you.

TYCHO

To anyone with a brain.

JUNIOR

Maybe I don't have one.

TYCHO

Maybe you don't.

JUNIOR

Fine. I quit.

(He starts to leave. Tycho stops him.)

TYCHO

You can't quit. We're working.

JUNIOR

I'm sick of squinting at the stars every night, sick of burning my fingers on the lantern, of scribbling in the dark. I'm sick of hearing you yell at me, at Tengenagel, at everyone. We're just wasting our time. Kepler's right--you have enough observations, you just don't know what to do with them.

TYCHO

Is that what he says?

JUNIOR

It's what I say, too.

TYCHO

What do you know about it?

JUNIOR

Nothing. All right? Nothing. I'm not a quick study, I'm not a budding young genius. I'm a good shot with a bow, I'm a good dancer, and I can out race nearly anyone in Germany. I'm sorry if that's not good enough for you.

TYCHO

Your damn right it's not good enough. You can be more, if you just put your mind to it. If you just--

JUNIOR

I've been putting my mind to it. I'm not going to solve workings of the universe, Father.

TYCHO

Maybe you can.

JUNIOR

You can't do it either. Maybe no one can. And if that's true, then we've been wasting our time.

TYCHO

We are not wasting--

JUNIOR

Every night for thirty-five years, and all you have to show for it is a stack of papers and a borrowed castle. I understand that it's important for you to think that it counts for something. But I don't. Good night.

(Junior exits.)

TYCHO

I am not wasting my time! I have made discoveries. I discovered the new star of 1577, I proved that the sky is not immutable, I proved Aristotle wrong. I have shown how the solar system works. I will be remembered. It's not just a pile of paper. Idiot!

(Tycho carries his candle (or lantern) to the strong box and opens it.)

TYCHO

It's not. Pile of papers my ass. It's a life. My life. I am surrounded by idiots. I am drowning. Drowning.

(Tycho removes a few sheets of paper. He stares at the flame of the candle for a while. He tears one paper into smaller pieces, then slowly plays with them in the candle, lighting them, then blowing them out.)

(Jep enters.)

JEP

Greetings, Grandfather. What are you doing?

TYCHO

There's the legacy of my life, Jep. A two foot high pile of papers.

JEP

And a fine legacy it is. Hard-earned. Certain to have a long life.

TYCHO

In the wrong hands, they will render me invisible.

JEP

And the right hands will paint your name in the sky.

TYCHO

I have not found the right hands.

JEP

You know his name.

TYCHO

They are mine, Jep. I have failed to use them properly.

JEP

You've done what no one else could.

TYCHO

I will not solve the workings of the universe.

JEP

Ah, the clock that cannot be opened.

TYCHO

Maybe no one can.

JEP

Maybe someone can.

TYCHO

It won't be Junior.

JEP

No.

TYCHO

It won't be a Brahe.

JEP

Does it matter?

TYCHO

That's the whole point.

JEP

It's too early to stop. Not yet.

TYCHO

That's up to me. Perhaps I have already done my share for science.

(He holds a lit paper in front of the strong box, then blows it out.)

JEP

Before you destroy a lifetime of work, you at least need another beer.

TYCHO

I have no such plans, Jep.

(Tycho lights another paper. Jep exits and returns with Kepler.)

TYCHO

Kepler. Go away.

KEPLER

Your sense of humor baffles me.

TYCHO

Yes, I'm full of jokes. Jep should be the master and I the fool.

JEP

Kepler.

KEPLER

But--

TYCHO

I have failed. I have it all at my fingertips and yet am unable to sculpt anything more than the most basic shape.

KEPLER

There will be other artists.

TYCHO

You?

KEPLER

I think so.

TYCHO

And what happens to me?

KEPLER

You will be part of it. You are already part of the solution, no matter who solves the rest of the puzzle, your contribution will remain.

TYCHO

Maybe you and the others should find your own pile of papers.

KEPLER

How selfish can you be?

TYCHO

I have no limits.

(Kepler grabs the sword from the wall.)

TYCHO

What are you doing?

KEPLER

Step away from the box, Tycho.

TYCHO

Or what? You'll stab me?

KEPLER

Exactly.

TYCHO

Put that down before you hurt yourself.

(He throws a lit piece of paper at Kepler, who dances away. He flicks another.)

KEPLER

Stop.

TYCHO

I'm sorry, tough young astronomer. Not afraid of fire, are you?

KEPLER

Of course not.

TYCHO

Because it will consume you. What will you do when you've beaten your head against these observations decade after decade? When you finally realize that in the end, you have accomplished nothing, that you do not have the capacity to make the final leap, that you have wasted your life. What will you do?

KEPLER

I will not give in to despair.

TYCHO

So confident that you'll never change, never grow old.

KEPLER

You can help provide the foundation for the entire science of astronomy.

TYCHO

I don't want to bear the weight of someone else, someone who finally sees the answer.

KEPLER

We are doomed by fate, Tycho. Even balanced on your shoulders, I will disappear in the shadow of the man on mine, and he in the shadows above him. It will be a tower reaching to the sun, all of us fading into shadow.

TYCHO

Let someone else be the foundation.

(Tycho lights another sheet of observations. Kepler slaps it out of Tycho's hand with the sword.)

KEPLER

I will not allow this.

(Tycho spins and grabs the sword from Kepler, tossing him to the ground. Jep jumps between them.)

TYCHO

Out of my way.

JEP

This is not the right path, Tycho.

TYCHO

I make my own choices.

JEP

Tycho.

(Tycho tosses Jep out of the way.)

TYCHO

Challenge me with my own sword, Kepler? Fine. It's you or them. As Jep is my witness. A pile of ashes or a hole in your liver.

KEPLER

Get it over with, you astronomical bully. Plunge quickly.  
Aim true.

TYCHO

Don't be flippant.

KEPLER

You doubt my sincerity, old man? Give it to me, and I'll do  
it myself.

TYCHO

You would.

KEPLER

I would give up life for science, you would give up science  
for the life of your name.

(Tycho tosses down the sword.)

TYCHO

Enough.

JEP

(calling out) The earth may resume spinning.

(Tycho locks the strong box.)

TYCHO

Get out of my sight. Go on. Go on. I am done playing with  
fire for the evening. Go away.

(Kepler exits.)

TYCHO

What am I doing, Jep?

JEP

Only you can say.

TYCHO

I feel sick. Roll me to the kitchen. I am drowning.

(They exit.)

(Kepler enters and stares into the lit  
candle.)

KEPLER

Tycho's flames can extinguish everything. How can God have entrusted his vision to a man of such weakness? We are all weak. We are blessed with God's vision and cursed with human nature.

(Jep walks into the candlelight. He holds Tycho's key.)

KEPLER

Are you an apparition?

JEP

Perhaps.

KEPLER

Where is Tycho?

JEP

Unconscious. A victim of the finest ale in the Empire.

KEPLER

Are you here to tempt me?

JEP

Both of us are tempted and tested this evening.

KEPLER

There is a responsibility that comes with a wealth of knowledge. If he is not capable...

JEP

Then they should fall to you?

KEPLER

I have vision.

JEP

As do I. But the future shimmers, I strain to see. The wrong choice, the wrong hands turning the wheel, and our moment shatters, the cracks reaching far into the future.

KEPLER

Let me hold it. For a moment.

JEP

The strength of your grasp would be unbreakable.

KEPLER

Don't underestimate my self-control.

JEP

Don't underestimate your desire.

KEPLER

They are not safe with him, Jep! His pile of ashes will hold back science for generations. I cannot duplicate his life's work. If he leaves behind nothing, nothingness will be my own legacy. Without the numbers, my chance will be wasted.

JEP

I have the same fears.

KEPLER

Think about the future. You cannot leave it in his hands.

JEP

I would not. If I had the choice.

KEPLER

The choice is swinging from your fingertips.

JEP

The decision is his.

KEPLER

Jep.

JEP

I have done too much already. Good night.

KEPLER

I see the future, Jep. It is--

JEP

Do you? Be sure you're ready when the time comes. Be worthy.

(Jep blows out the candle, leaving only darkness.)

SCENE 6

(Tycho and Tegnagel in the observatory, working at the instruments.)

TENGNAGEL

Are you going to hire more assistants?

TYCHO

What do you think I should do, Tegnagel?

TENGNAGEL

Without Junior, we don't have enough hands. And if I were you, I would keep Kepler as far from here as possible.

TYCHO

And why is that?

TENGNAGEL

I just think we might have another situation.

TYCHO

Don't be cryptic.

TENGNAGEL

He's greedy. And he sneaks around. I caught him with sheets of observations, he must have copied them. He tore them up before I could seize them, but I know what they were.

TYCHO

Ungrateful, sneaking beggar. I wish I could say I'm surprised. Damn him. Impatient wretch. What do you think we should do?

TENGNAGEL

Perhaps Kepler should go back to teaching mathematics and leave astronomy to us.

TYCHO

You don't understand his mind.

TENGNAGEL

He's a quick study, true. And a fast calculator. Leave him in his room, working the numbers. He's dangerous, Tycho. A danger to your name, to your life's work.

TYCHO

Time, Tegnagel. Time. There is only so much--

TENGNAGEL

We have the numbers. He's tossed a few small ideas our way, stimulation, putting us back on course.

Reading the Mind of God/Gabridge p.91  
We may not need much more time. I understand more of what he  
says every day. Genius TENGNAGEL (s own claim, I say.

TYCHO

You think you can so ably fill his shoes?

TENGNAGEL

I have not a single doubt.

(Christine enters, Junior trails  
reluctantly behind her.)

CHRISTINE

Tycho Brahe, I would like a word with you.

TYCHO

What's he doing here?

CHRISTINE

You owe each other apologies. I have enough to tolerate in  
this world, without the two of you being beastly to each  
other.

TENGNAGEL

Hello, Junior.

CHRISTINE

(to Tengenagel) And you, one word or smile from you and I'll  
make your next few months living Hell. Do I make myself  
clear?

TENGNAGEL

Crystal.

CHRISTINE

Tycho?

TYCHO

I'm sorry you felt you had to drag your mother into this.

JUNIOR

It wasn't my idea.

CHRISTINE

You drag everyone into everything, Tycho. You think this is  
a castle full of secrets? We can hear your bellowing echo  
all across the courtyard. When was the last time you  
performed a useful deed or act of destruction with quiet  
dignity?

TYCHO

Subtlety is not my strong suit, I confess.

CHRISTINE

Junior is here for apologies.

TYCHO

Do you think--

CHRISTINE

Yes, I do. But Junior will speak first.

JUNIOR

This is unfair.

CHRISTINE

Were you asked to express an opinion?

JUNIOR

I'm sorry, Father. I'm not sorry for being angry, because you've treated me like a servant, but there's no excuse for my cruel words, nor for storming off.

CHRISTINE

You have behaved like a child.

JUNIOR

I'm sorry. It will not happen again. I will respect your wishes. I will work as hard as I can. But I will also continue to express my opinions, though far more respectfully, if possible.

TYCHO

Junior, you're not a dog... I'm sorry if I kicked you around like one. You disappoint me only in the same way that I disappoint myself. Am I sad that astronomy is not your calling? Yes. It wounds me to the core. But who can be responsible for that more than I? You are who you are, and if I ask more than that, I'm only being greedy. Sometimes I am a greedy man.

JUNIOR

I'm willing to help you as much as you need, Father.

CHRISTINE

It is a beautiful night.

TYCHO

A beautiful night for a party. Surely you have friends somewhere who have cause to celebrate tonight.

JUNIOR

I could find some.

TYCHO

Good. Come back tomorrow night.

JUNIOR

Thanks.

(He exits.)

CHRISTINE

I'm glad you're still capable of surprising me.

TYCHO

I struggle with a long list of vices.

(An offstage splash.)

CHRISTINE

It's nice that you have the power to prevail.

TYCHO

I'm glad you think so.

CHRISTINE

Good night.

TYCHO

I may join you.

CHRISTINE

That would make two surprises in one evening.

(She exits, passing Kepler who enters with Jep. Kepler is dripping wet.)

JEP

I finally found him.

TYCHO

What happened to you?

KEPLER

I threw myself into the pond.

TENGNAGEL

Why?

KEPLER

I spent the last twenty-four hours preparing an emphatic speech about responsibility and the future. I was feverish with self-importance and indignation... I thought a dunking might restore my perspective.

TENGNAGEL

Did it work?

(Tycho looks uncomfortable, and it gets worse throughout the following.)

KEPLER

No.

TYCHO

I've heard unkind rumors about you, Kepler.

KEPLER

From Tegnagel, no doubt. They are the true.

TYCHO

Perhaps we should treat you like a hostile spy and search you every evening.

KEPLER

I am here to demand the key.

TYCHO

You what?

TENGNAGEL

He's gone mad again.

JEP

A small amount of patience would have served you better, Kepler.

KEPLER

My patience is gone. It has been replaced by fear and anger. What will the future say to you, Tycho?

TYCHO

Who do you think you are?

TENGNAGEL

He's an insolent fool.

KEPLER

You have done more for science than any man I know. Your contributions outshine the wildest dreams of most men. But they belong to the future, to an age of exploration, to scientists and navigators. If your fear of death and obscurity leads you to destroy your treasure, the future will never forgive you. In the name of posterity, for the safety of your own legacy, I demand the key.

TYCHO

It belongs to me until I give it to another. When the time comes, I choose the future, not you. Not some boy who has barely laid a finger on the mysteries of science, who has...

(Tycho collapses in agony.)

SCENE 7

(Kepler and Christine at the foot of Tycho's bed. The others hover near Tycho.)

KEPLER

There's nothing we can do besides try to make him comfortable. And pray.

CHRISTINE

I hope God is listening.

TYCHO

Bring me a beer.

JUNIOR

The doctor said you're only to drink water.

TYCHO

The doctor is a quack. Goddammit, I'm not going out of this world sober!

CHRISTINE

Go fetch some beer.

(Junior exits.)

CHRISTINE

Tycho. Please stay calm. You must rest. You must rest.

TYCHO

I am resting... I'm dying... Christine.

(Tycho takes Christine's hand.)

TYCHO

You have been my foundation, and you never creaked nor whimpered, despite the enormity of your burden. Thank you.

CHRISTINE

You're a strong, good man, Tycho. Don't leave now.

TYCHO

I hear God whispering my name, and for once I don't have the strength to argue.

CHRISTINE

You must try.

TYCHO

This will be my last failure.

CHRISTINE

Your only.

TYCHO

I know better. We all know better. I have had many triumphs, and I've had you to share them. A man can only ask for so much.

CHRISTINE

Love.

TYCHO

I wish you didn't have to see me like this.

CHRISTINE

As long as I can be by your side..

TYCHO

Christine. Please. Everyone. Leave me, for a moment. I must speak with Kepler.

CHRISTINE

I'll be right back.

(Christine, Elizabeth, and Jep exit.  
Tengnagel and Kepler remain.)

TYCHO

(to Tengnagel)

What? What do you want?

TENGNAGEL

If he's here, I should safeguard your key. I thought--

TYCHO

You thought? Are you capable? Is it what Kepler and I call thinking? Perhaps you were ruminating, stewing, plotting, salivating? Are you ready to undertake the burden of History, Tengnagel?

TENGNAGEL

I am ready and able.

TYCHO

You will be sufficiently challenged with attempting to be a good husband for my daughter.

TENGNAGEL

But we are collaborators, Tycho. You know--

TYCHO

I know you too well to give you what you want. You've already taken my daughter. Let that be your reward.

TENGNAGEL

After years of toiling together, every night... Surely... Tycho, please.

TYCHO

Down on your knees! Not to beg, but to crawl away. I know you will return to hound Kepler, but that will be his problem. One of many. Get OUT!

Tengnagel exits. Tycho lies still for a moment, exhausted from his efforts.

TYCHO

My time is finished, Kepler.

KEPLER

Perhaps.

TYCHO

Don't be foolish.

KEPLER

I believe in hope.

(Tycho is silent again, in pain, collecting himself.)

TYCHO

I hope I will not have lived in vain.

KEPLER

Don't worry.

TYCHO

Teach my system. Drop Copernicus into the trash heap where he belongs.

KEPLER

The Tychonic system doesn't make sense.

TYCHO

The earth is in the center. It has to be. The data all fit. Even the scriptures agree...

KEPLER

Let's not argue.

TYCHO

Kepler. Please.

KEPLER

I won't make a promise I can't keep.

TYCHO

Not even to a dying man.

KEPLER

Especially to a dying man.

TYCHO

You're a bastard, Kepler.

KEPLER

It's quality we share. I'm sorry for many things, Tycho. My arrogance, my behavior... It's not the way one should treat a friend.

TYCHO

I have not always acted like your friend... Remember me for my better moments. For my achievements.

KEPLER

I will. History will. Your name will be written in the heavens.

(Tycho removes the key from around his neck and presses it into Kepler's hand.)

TYCHO

This belongs to you... They'll lead you to Heaven and back again.

KEPLER

Thank you for your confidence.

TYCHO

You'll find what you're looking for. I have sent a letter to the Emperor, recommending you as my successor... Keep your head in the stars.

KEPLER

I will.

TYCHO

Good night, my son.

KEPLER

Good night.

(Tycho dies. Kepler embraces him.)

THE END.