

The 13th Library

Book One

Nine Nations

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Dedicated to R. Smith, who asked that I
make something of the idea.

Disclaimer: The years, places, public events,
and some people herein are historical. The
book's remaining contents adds a fictional
layer.

Book One

Chapter One

Nick White sat in a windowless room, his metal chair creaking against the floor. The icebreaker, a massive steel vessel called Andora, was unlike anything Nick had experienced, even as a collegiate sailor. The ship climbed onto the ice, causing Nick's chair to squeak as it rubbed against the floor, leaning him backward.

He waited as the ice broke under the hull's pressure with a great fall that caused him to lurch forward and then bounce for a moment before the ship steadied. He felt the rhythm continue, backing up, then ramming up again.

It had been a very long two weeks, with little alone time or explanation. Someone was always outside his room or waiting in the halls whenever he travelled. He could only leave his quarters when requested or for what they called chow.

Nick knew there were several other international delegates on board; that much of the briefing he understood. Ramming again, his chair lurched backward. He grew irritated by having to wait as the ship bounced up and down.

It was nearing the thousandth time Nick had calculated, and he wondered how much more ice Antarctica could have. Which he joked he wasn't willing to do the math on.

Finally, a man he only knew as Sarge from Texas came in, smoking a cigar, and handed Nick a folder.

Sarge sat down and put out the cigar as he motioned for the guards to close the door. The ship's walls were frost-covered, breath visible under the dim lamp light, a strong smell of tobacco filled the small room before Sarge's large size did, leaving a faint haze in the freezing air.

Inside the file, Nick found a single sheet of paper, which felt soft and thick to the touch. Reading the words to himself, he mumbled out loud.

“November 1955, to the United States of America, you are one of the Nine Nations on Earth being invited to visit the 13th Library of Alexandria. It has been 2,278 years since representatives were accepted for questions, select one human being, and have them come to this location with questions.”

“That is why you are here,” Sarge told him, pulling the paper away so he couldn’t memorize the coordinates or study the foreign texture and style of ink. Nick was a tool, and tools didn’t need to know things.

“I have a lot of questions. 2,278 years is roughly the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BCE.”

“Your curiosity isn’t what matters; your unique combination of skills is required,” Sarge interrupted firmly on the US Government’s behalf. “You are going to ask exactly what America wants you to. Then you’re going to tell us whether this is a hoax or if we really do have access to an ancient lost library.”

The ship lurched forward again, breaking more ice. Nick held up his right hand, as though giving an oath, resting his left hand on the file. “I understand. Washington isn’t about to let the next advantage belong to someone else.”

“Word it more professionally. Determine the strategic value. Assess military significance. Identify any political advantages possible for taking the site.”

Nick sat there; this moment, if real, was turning history.

“We could learn so much if they were untouched by the death of Alexander, the rise and fall of so many empires.”

Sarge glared; even wording his curiosity out loud was not appropriate. “As I said, your curiosity is not to be pursued; your questions are issued to you, just tell us if the place is real.”

Sarge's salt-and-pepper eyebrows were overgrown and covered his brown eyes, which narrowed into slits like his patience.

“A SnoCat will be here to pick you up in a few hours, and then you start your journey to the coordinates and Mr. White?”

Nick lifted his hood. The heavy wool coat scratched against his neck as he pulled it tighter. Standing up to leave the room, his blond hair sticking out untamed, much like his discipline in some regards.

Sarge decided not to mince words.

“Son, don't fuck this up.”