

The Library

Emma

We entered the library.

Or at least, I *assumed* it was the library.

As I quickly found myself thrust into a space that was far more *cramped* than it should have been.

Gone was the airy expansive atrium, and its connected halls that branched forever into infinity.

Gone too was the dark and dreary dungeon of obsidian, slate, and cobblestone, whose maze-like corridors folded and abstracted inwards into nothing.

In its place was a quaint room. Or at least, quaint by Nexian and library standards. As it felt more like the lobby of one of those heritage woodland hotels that was adamant on sacrificing *all* of the worldly comforts of modernity for the irreplicable experience of *authenticity*.

In the place of a complex design of at least four different stones per square feet, were solid beams of unlacquered wood that covered all four sides of the room, floor included. In the place of a ceiling that was second only to those grand revivalist domes in Europe was an open A-frame roof with a modest loft covered in layer upon layer of hand-knitted tapestries, and woven quilts. I could tell they were hand-knitted too, as unlike everything else in the Nexus thus far, their flawed design, and imperfect patterns, were on proud display.

No space was wasted in this small quaint room. As in a similar vein to those *solartown* communities, every inch of available space was smartly used up, all without risking walking into the trap that was clutter.

Bookshelves were *carved* into the four major support beams that kept the A-frame roof aloft. More shelving units of similarly *rustic* build quality lined all the available wall-space there was, which was to say, there wasn't much of them at all. But what shelves did exist were *packed* to the brim with books. Each of their spines consisted of titles with lettering that was haphazard and inconsistent, like they were each etched by hand as opposed to uniformly printed like the rest of the books in the library.

More interestingly, the language being used wasn't being translated by the EVI. Which meant it wasn't High Nexian. The strange lettering actually reminded me of the book of punishments Buddy had brought out earlier.

[Point of Active Interpolation: Logographic, Syllabic, Alphabetic similarities to HIGH NEXIAN... 0 PERCENT. Closest calculable relationship... UNKNOWN LANGUAGE 02 at... 97.3 PERCENT accuracy as calculated using current available datasets.]

A thought that was quickly corroborated by the EVI, as it immediately confirmed my suspicions without needing any prompting.

The IAS' eggheads did say the thing was adaptive to its user's input and 'command style' after all. It just didn't occur to me it'd be *this* quick in its adaptiveness.

Regardless, it was clear that even the rest of the gang seemed more or less shocked by this new setting. Each of them performed their own double-takes as they maintained a tight cohesive grouping around me and Ilunor.

Walking further in, we were almost immediately greeted by what could only be described as a 'front desk' of sorts. A wrap-around counter reminiscent of those bars you find at medieval themed inns.

Similar to the rest of the wooden constructs in the room, its surfaces were unlacquered, unpolished, and could barely be described as finished or processed in any way, save for the woodcutting used to bring it down to an appropriate shape and size.

Behind the counter was a corkboard, one that seemed to have different caricatures drawn on paper and haphazardly pinned up. One image in particular caught my attention, what seemed to be a sketch drawn in crayon of a bustling campsite, with a particularly large tent dominating the middle of the grounds.

[ALERT: CONTACT DETECTED. IFF UNKNOWN.]

But all of that was quickly put aside as the EVI quickly highlighted the appearance of a new contact.

My attention was hastily drawn back with a spike of adrenaline, as a humanoid figure of roughly Thalmin's height suddenly entered the fray from an unseen backroom just behind the wooden counter.

All four of us instinctively got into a battle-ready position almost all at once. Thalmin unsheathing his sword, Thacea poising herself for some sort of a magical strike, and Ilunor... quickly reaching for his blanket.

Yet before anything could happen, the figure's face finally came into view by virtue of a magical flame being lit on the counter, revealing his hooded shadowy face to be none other than that of a familiar, friendly vulpine.

“B-buddy?” I announced hesitantly, pulling my hand away from my holster.

“INDEED IT IS I, EMMA!” He exclaimed giddily, panting excitedly once more as in a matter of seconds, what had been a vaguely humanoid shape suddenly *burst open*, revealing at least 4 foxes underneath the large oversized suit of armor. Each of whom promptly scampered off into different directions, leaving a pile of leather, cloth, and bits and pieces of armor to fall limply to the floor in their wake.

“What... what *is* all of this?” I continued, my face scrunching up in confusion underneath my helmet, as the little fox settled down politely on the counter, shaking off the remnants of that outfit.

“I informed you earlier did I not, Emma?” Buddy cocked his little head in a way only a canine, or in this case, a vulpine could. His perky triangular ears bounced as a result. “The library will observe and-”

“-react accordingly.” I interrupted the fox, completing that sentence for him. Repeating those vague few words Buddy had used to affirm my little commitment to the bounty-hunting quest of bringing Ilunor in. I looked around once more, out of a habit and a desire to reinforce my current mood through these simple uses of body language. “How... how does any of this fit into the library *reacting accordingly*? And what was that whole deal with the outfit all about-?”

“Ah! Well, you see this was-”

“-*is*. Not *was*.” A familiar voice suddenly interjected. The librarian’s entrance this time was far more modest than it had been before. Gone were the huge gusts of wind and *thump thump thump* of the flapping of his wings. Instead, he merely emerged from the back, walking along the counter until he once more found himself perched atop of Buddy’s head. “I will take it from here, *Buddy*.” He spoke, before turning towards me.

“This-” The owl gestured throughout the room with both wings. “-*is* the lobby, Cadet Emma Booker. A space that is reserved for those of private intent and unbound by written treaty to deliver *articles of interest* from the world outside. The space you-” The owl paused once more, taking a moment to carefully glare at Thacea, Thalmin, and Ilunor in rapid succession. “-and your *compatriots* find yourselves in, is referred to as *The Seeker’s Respite* by many who had once frequented this particular location within the library.”