

It was like nothing he'd ever seen — not on any monitors, nor even in the headsets. Afternoon sunlight drifted through the clouds, between the flowing leaves of plum trees, and onto the tall grass below. Lovebirds chirped in the soft shade. He'd seen all these elements on their own before, but something about their whole here was much greater than the sum of its parts. He knew how it all looked and sounded but had no idea what it really felt like. Something ached within him.

Alexander stared at this idyllic scene from inside a large room, through an enormous archway engraved with ancient symbols glowing in purple neon. Dozens of people were gathered here in the Grand Foyer to gawk at the outside world, but none dared pass into it. Instead everyone huddled toward the walls, looking back and forth between the archway and each other as if seeking affirmation that they were indeed all seeing the same thing. Their faces showed a stabbing curiosity, but their posture showed a fear far worse. That is, except for the few people from a distant village outside the archway who bewilderingly came and went through it as they pleased.

He looked to his father beside him who peered over and scolded, "There, you wanted to see it and now you've seen it! I don't understand why it was so important for you to come here, we can generate all these things at home. We never should have come here."

Alexander's father was profoundly unsettled by the open landscape before them, for like his son, this beautiful place which embodied both a simple human freedom and the terrifying unknown twisted something deep in his being. Panicking, he grabbed Alexander's arm and yanked him through the crowd, toward the back of the Grand Foyer, further and further away from the fresh air. Alexander fought back with all his might, but his father, a large man, was now in shock and possessed with an overpowering, primal strength. Everything in his nature was compelling him to not stop for anything, to just run back to the tunnel they had arrived here from as quickly as possible.

Suddenly Alexander was knocked down as he and his father collided with one of the village people, whose books were thrown across the floor.

"What's wrong with you? Watch where you're going! Stay away, freak!" bellowed Alexander's father, fuming with rage and panic, to which the villager said nothing, but simply met his eyes with a stoic glare. In that brief second Alexander, angry at his father and curious about the villager, took one of the books from the floor and put it in his bag before either could notice, although he didn't have time to read its cover before he was grabbed and again forced to march toward the back of the large room.

Soon they arrived at an opening: a seemingly endless tunnel whose aluminum walls were covered in crude graffiti, and whose only source of light was a wide, bright blue beam which radiated down its length and off into the distant darkness. They walked onto an elevated platform and prepared to fall forward into the beam which would take them back home, but Alexander's father hesitated for a moment. After catching his breath, he looked to Alexander with angst in his eyes and sternly said, "Son, you must never leave the Library".