

The Last Librarian of Alexandria

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Genre: Thriller

The Alexandria Protocol

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Chapter 1

Scene 1: The story continues with new developments

The rain fell in sheets across Neo-London's glass towers, each droplet refracting the neon advertisements that pulsed through the perpetual twilight. Shade pressed herself against the slick wall of the alley, her breath forming small clouds in the cold air. The chip in her pocket felt heavier than its actual weight--a thumb-sized piece of crystalline memory that supposedly didn't exist.

She'd been running for three hours.

The Archivists would have traced her digital footprint by now. Every camera, every scanner, every networked device in the city was their eye. She pulled the collar of her coat higher, obscuring the barcode tattoo on her neck that marked her as a licensed information broker. That license wouldn't protect her anymore. Not after what she'd stolen.

A drone hummed overhead, its searchlight cutting through the rain like a scalpel. Shade didn't move. Movement meant heat signature fluctuation. Heat signature fluctuation meant detection. She'd learned that the hard way in the Restricted Sectors.

The light passed.

She exhaled slowly and risked a glance at her handheld scanner. The decryption was at seventy-three percent. Whatever data the old man had died protecting, it was locked behind security protocols she'd never encountered before. Pre-Collapse encryption. Possibly older.

Her fingers trembled--not from cold, but from the implications.

The Alexandria Protocol was supposed to be a myth. A fairy tale told by conspiracy theorists in the dark corners of the UnderNet. The idea that somewhere, hidden in the digital ruins of the old world, existed a complete archive of human knowledge from before the Great Forgetting. Books, histories, sciences--all the things the Council had deemed too dangerous for public consumption.

But the old man's eyes had been clear when he pressed the chip into her palm in that burning bookshop. "Find the Librarian," he'd whispered, blood on his lips. "Before they erase everything."

Then the enforcers had broken through the door, and Shade had run.

A notification blinked on her scanner: *DECRYPTION COMPLETE.*

She opened the file.

Coordinates. A location deep in the Submerged Quarter, where Old London drowned beneath the rising Thames. And a single word in ancient text she barely recognized: *Alexandria.*

Footsteps echoed at the alley's entrance--precise, measured, multiple sets. Shade's pulse quickened. She pocketed the scanner and moved deeper into the shadows, her hand finding the illegal plasma cutter concealed in her boot.

"Shade Mercer." The voice was synthesized, emotionless. An Archivist. "You possess unauthorized data. Surrender the device and submit to memory wipe. This is your only warning."

She smiled grimly in the darkness. Memory wipe. They wanted her to forget everything--the old man, the chip, the coordinates. To become another blank slate in their curated reality.

Not today.

Shade triggered the fire escape ladder and launched herself upward as plasma bolts scorched the air where she'd been standing. The metal rungs were slippery with rain, but her hands found purchase. Below, the Archivists' white uniforms glowed in the darkness like hunting ghosts.

She climbed faster.

The rooftop emerged through the mist--a maze of ventilation shafts and satellite arrays. Shade ran, leaping between buildings, her boots splashing through puddles that reflected the fractured sky. Behind her, the Archivists followed with mechanical precision.

She reached the edge of the building and looked down. Forty stories of nothing but air and rain and the drowned streets far below. The next rooftop was too far. No human could make that jump.

The Archivists were closing in.

Shade pulled out the scanner one more time, memorizing the coordinates. Then she crushed it beneath her heel, scattering the fragments across the rooftop. They could have the device. They couldn't have what she'd already committed to memory.

She turned to face them, hands raised.

"Smart choice," the lead Archivist said, extending a hand for the chip.

Shade's fingers closed around it in her pocket. The old man's blood had stained one edge brown. She thought of all the books she'd seen burning in that shop. All that knowledge turning to ash.

"I don't think so," she said.

And stepped backward off the roof.

The rain rushed past her face as she fell, her hand jamming the emergency beacon that would--if

her contact kept his promises--activate the catch net three stories down. If he'd betrayed her, she had about four seconds to regret every choice that led to this moment.

The net caught her with bruising force, then released, dropping her onto a hovering cargo platform. She rolled, gasping, as the platform lurched into motion, diving into the vertical traffic lanes.

Above, the Archivists stood at the roof's edge, watching her escape.

Shade clutched the chip and allowed herself a shaking breath. The Submerged Quarter. The coordinates. The Librarian.

Whoever they were, they were her only lead now.

The platform descended into the neon-soaked depths of Neo-London, and Shade disappeared into the city's endless night, carrying a secret that could unravel everything the Council had built.

Or get her killed trying.

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