

Chapter 14

On Globalization

At about 2 AM, Doug found himself awakened. The boat lurched from side to side and the flashing of lights in the distance disturbed his eyes, despite them being closed. There was a rhythmic ringing sound filling the air.

Also, his dad was pulling at his arm.

“Doug. Wake up.”

“Wha-”

“Doug. You said you met Dr. Currier?”

“Yeah. What’s going on?”

“Any idea where he is?”

Doug thought about this for a minute. He had an idea where Rich was, and the Freemers. Maybe Currier was with them by now. “I think so,” he said.

“Okay. We’ve got to get moving now.”

Through the porthole, Doug could see beams of light flashing around in the air. They moved back and forth erratically, brushing the surface of the waves. They were miles off. Otherwise, the night was black.

“What is that?”

“Those are choppers, searching the area where they dropped you.”

“Shit! How far away-“

“Far enough. We can get underway with no markers. know. Better to put some distance between us while it’s dark.”

“Where do we go?”

“That’s what I wanted to ask you. While we’re running, we may as well head in the right direction-”

“New York,” Doug answered quickly. “We’ve got to get to New York.”

“City?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“My friends are there. Believe me.”

“Get back to sleep,” said Jonathan as he turned to run up the gangway. Doug looked back at the roving lights. Maybe he imagined it, but they seemed to be closer.

Doug knew he would never get back to sleep. He threw off the blanket and found the clothes his dad had left for him. He reached for the light switch and paused. What were the chances that the cabin light would be visible to the helicopters miles away? He took one more look through the porthole and decided against it. He put the pants and shirt on in the dark.

Stepping down, Doug’s bare foot felt a soaking wet towel on the floor, so he gave up on socks and shoes. He stood up, careful not to hit his head on the ceiling or trip over the bulkhead door. He cautiously made his way up the gangway and onto the deck. It was freezing, and a brisk wind was blowing across the open water. He crossed his arms and watched the lights as Jonathan started the boat.

The boat lurched forward, and Doug climbed the ladder to the pilot’s deck. Jonathan was on his toes, arched over the

front of the steering wheel, as if looking for something in the water below.

“Dad, what’s up?”

“Doug, it’s too cold for you up here.” He looked at Doug’s bare feet. “Get back below.” Then he turned back toward the water.

“What are you looking for?”

“We’re in a harbor. I’m just looking for the channel. And I’m trying not to hit any moorings. Or rocks.”

Doug looked around. They were far from the coast, but there was a dark island to one side. He could see a couple of house lights in the trees. When his eyes focused, he could actually see dozens of other boats, a sleeping village and a town dock. The ringing sounds he could hear were sailboat clips banging off their masts. The wind threw up whitecaps in the harbor, creating a symphony of metallic clangs.

Jonathan slowly drove the boat between the sailboats, and finally, they were in the channel he was looking for. He found the buoys that showed the way out, and he stepped the throttle up a little bit.

“We’ll hit the open ocean, and then pick up the throttle. We won’t be able to use the lights for awhile.”

Doug looked back at the searchlights. Jonathan was slowly putting distance between them and the choppers. He knew it was illegal to travel in darkness, but how illegal was it to run from Federal agents?

“Dad, if you were a witness, couldn’t you get us out of this?” Doug asked.

“No. Even if they cared, we’d rot in a cell for a month before they sorted it out.”

Doug stood silently on the deck watching the lights move slowly away.

“And your friends, right now we need to get to them, right?” asked Jonathan.

“Yeah,” Doug said. He was starting to shiver.

“Doug, get below. This is the open ocean, and this is more than a breeze.”

Doug had had enough of the freezing wind and was glad to oblige. “Okay,” he said. He climbed down the ladder and ducked back into the cabin. He didn’t think he was going to feel warm for awhile.

“Doug,” said a voice. Kand was awake. He reached for the light switch.

“No!” Doug hollered, grabbing his hand. He felt a sleeve, and realized he had gotten dressed.

“We’re being followed. We’ve got to stay dark.”

Kand lowered his hand. “I am sorry for my words, he said. I am grateful for your father’s help, and I failed to show him grace.”

“I’m sure it’s alright,” Doug said.

“I will make my failure known when the chance appears.”

“Fine,” Doug said. “So, you’re up. Thank you for your help, well, saving my life, really.”

“It was you who gave me the icon,” he said, placing his undamaged hand over the necklace.

“I guess. You said before that the Free Majority people have it wrong,” Doug said, pointing to the necklace. “How is it wrong?”

“Surely, in all you have learned tonight, you know they are misguided, so I will tell you.”

Kand leaned forward so he could hold the symbol under the dim light that came through the porthole. Doug could barely make out the symbols in broad daylight. They were just shapeless bumps in the darkness.

“This symbol goes back more than just generations or centuries. It is so old that the beginning cannot even be seen,” Kand told him. “One of the earliest known versions was scratched into a cliff wall in Persia. The symbols are different, but the circle and the nine segments are unmistakable.”

“So it comes from Iran?”

“No. Similar carvings and artifacts have been found as far away as Spain, India and Tibet as well. And the artifacts are too close in time to the Persian carving. So they shared a common ancestor.”

“An old religious symbol, then?”

“No. That’s why the symbol is interesting. It has never been part of any religion.”

“It has religious symbols in it, though,” Doug said.

“Yes, different ones depending on the people who carry it. That’s why it is not used in any religion. All people saw it as the symbol of their enemy.”

Doug looked out through the porthole, realizing that their own enemies were probably catching on by now that they had survived and were on a boat headed south.

“So what does it mean?” Doug asked.

“In the nine boxes are the components of civilization. The middle layer has the origins of all life, the resources, the work, and the law.”

“They told us that.”

“But it was not in the center. This is important. It is central to the symbol’s message.”

“No, it was on the left side.”

“Right. That is wrong. The left side is for the physical manipulation of the three roots. The control of resources, assisted work, and codification.”

“You mean religion.”

“The earliest form of rule, right. That’s why the grid is not religious. It is a higher layer of spirituality.”

“So the right side is for advanced technology?”

“No. It is for representation of the three roots; currency, communication, and government.”

“But it’s out of order,” Doug demanded. “If the roots are in the middle, it does not imply progress.”

“You are shrewd. It does not show progress.”

“Why not?”

“Because progress is not a component of civilization.”

That was a strange notion to Doug, and he quietly leaned back against the bulkhead. He realized he had not yet sat down. He had always thought of progress as a given. His short career as a banker was based on it.

“So this symbol is basically saying cavemen had it right,” Doug said, not very impressed with the grid anymore.

“No. It is saying that whatever type of civilization you are in, these nine components describe it. There is no one ‘right’ way of things. As long as the symbol is used, it prescribes balance for civilization at all levels.”

“But there are wrong ways. You said the Free Majority people used it wrong.”

“Yes, because they order the symbols from left to right, with the roots on the left. They imply progress, but the Free Majority are the only people who use the icon that way.”

Doug stood in silence and turned his head to look through the porthole again.

Kand went on, “An incomplete symbol would also describe an uncivilized society.”

“How so?”

“Without food, famine. Without law, anarchy. Without a complete map, hardship and war are inevitable.”

Doug thought for a minute about the state of the world. There was always plenty of war and famine somewhere. “Kand, doesn’t this grid mean that all people everywhere have to be at the same technological level to avoid these problems?”

“No. The Free Majority have taken it and made themselves believe it prescribes global homogenization, global balance. But think about this: global balance would not necessarily bring primitive civilizations to the level you know, because it would also collapse the one you live in.”

Doug decided that he could not hear any more of this. He was not some kind of ideological crackpot, and he was determined that Kand would not turn him into one.

Although, Doug figured, maybe he was right, and the Free Majority were a bunch of loons. They had kidnapped Rich and Vanessa, so their credibility was pretty much shot.

Doug needed to think this stuff over, and he also needed sleep. “Can we take this up in the morning?” he asked.

“Certainly.”

Doug pulled the blankets open and crawled into his bunk. He rolled away from Kand, but could still feel his eyes and the surprised expression on his face at his abrupt exit from the conversation. Doug closed his eyes.

Instantly, sunlight beamed through the porthole, directly onto Doug’s face. The inside of his eyelids turned fiery red. He blinked and raised his head to see out, and saw nothing but a sparkling blue ocean. The boat lurched rhythmically and Doug noticed that they were not moving.

It was morning. Doug felt like he had been asleep for only a second. As he pulled the blankets back, he realized that he felt warm for the first time in over a day. The sunbeam created a warm spot on the blanket, and he ran his hand over it.

Doug turned over to see if Kand was still asleep. He wasn't even there. Doug heard voices coming from the deck outside. He wondered what time it was, and this was reason enough to get up and go see what was going on.

He stood, pulled on a coat that he found hanging on a peg, and groggily climbed through the bulkhead onto the stern deck. Kand and Jonathan were arguing about something, though both of them were cooperating in blowing up a grey rubber boat. Dad stepped on the bellows, filling each chamber with air, while Kand stretched out each section and inserted wooden panels.

They had not noticed Doug yet. He started to make out what they were saying.

“They want all nations to become friendlier to corporations,” said Jonathan.

“No,” said Kand. “Nations are irrelevant. They would rather like to see corporations replace them.”

“How is that possible?”

“It has happened before. Government has slowly replaced religion as the enforcer of laws.”

“But government is based on the consensus of a population.”

“And corporations are an economic extension of that consensus. What sells becomes the basis for law.”

“Except that corporations enrich only a few, while governments seek to spread the wealth.”

“Not all,” said Kand, then he looked up and saw Doug.

Dad turned around. “Oh, morning. There's some fruit on the table, there.” He pointed to a table set up on the deck. There were apples, bananas and grapes.

“Any coffee?” Doug asked.

“As a matter of fact, yes.” Jonathan ducked into the cabin and grabbed a pot and a tin mug. “Hope you like it black.”

“Thank you,” Doug said. He nodded to Kand and went back into the cabin. He rarely took coffee black, but he was starving, and found it perfectly tolerable. Doug dug into the fruit bowl and grabbed an apple.

“We were just talking about Globalization,” said Jonathan. “Kand here is something of an expert. I thought I knew something, but...”

“I noticed, I think,” Doug said, looking at Kand. He kept his head down, working on the raft.

The boat rocked in the mild swell. Doug noticed a strip of land not too far away.

“Dad, where are we?” he asked.

“That's Plum Island. We're near the Ipswich River mouth.” It had taken all night to get back to Massachusetts.

“I poured the coals to it all night, but now that it's daylight, we've got to lay low. Take it slow.”

“Dad, I have no idea why Rich and Vanessa were taken. I have no idea how long they have.”

“I know, Doug,” Jonathan said. “I wish we could get there faster. The Free Majority needs them for something, and we have no idea why, but they are probably safe for now.”

“We have no way to know that.”

“The Free Majority are a bunch of crackpots, but they are not dangerous.”

Kand looked up at Doug and Jonathan with a dour expression. He did not seem to agree.

“So what do we do?”

Jonathan sat back from the work he was doing on the raft. “The people looking for you are far more dangerous than the Free Majority. If they think you are involved with Currier, they will do whatever they need to get him.”

“But they are government agents, right?”

“Not really. They are government, but these guys are beyond military. Beyond law. They have free reign to pursue criminals with no trace of regulation. After what they did to you, you really think they’re above board?”

“No.”

“Yuh. They are borderliners. Free agents. They do what they want, use what they want, and I’ll tell you something else; Currier is their equal.”

“What do you mean?”

“The stuff I could tell you about Currier. He’s like a shadow,” Jonathan said “People only know his public image.”

Doug sat down on the edge of the boat. “So what kind of stuff did you have on him, anyway?” Doug asked. “Is he some kind of terrorist?”

“Not exactly.”

“Do you know what he is up to?”

“Well, he and his followers started a software company a few years ago,” Jonathan replied.

“What kind of software?” asked Kand.

“Not sure. The company has no website and no public filings. I know they hired people from MIT, and did a lot of work for investment firms and banks, and one Chinese shipping company.”

Doug leaned forward. “I think I might have an idea what he’s doing,” he said.

“What do you mean?”

“I was with him yesterday. In his office building in Weymouth.”

“Weymouth?” asked Dad. Kand stopped what he was doing and sat quietly watching both of them.

“It was his computer lab. His group had written their stock market database there.”

“Database?” Jonathan asked.

Doug sat back and looked at his father carefully. Jonathan must have known about the database if he’d been following Currier and the Freemers for so long.

“It’s just a database we use at work. It is plugged into the stock market.”

Jonathan looked incredulous. “I could never confirm that they actually did this,” he said.

“The Free Majority students designed it for PMW. We used it to model the markets.”

“Oh, God.” Jonathan said as he slumped against the bulkhead. “Let me guess, it doesn’t just read the market, it can do more.”

Doug’s eyes widened. “Yes. It definitely can.”

“It tampers with it.”

“Right. It can even change stock values,” Doug said. “Dad, what does this mean?”

Jonathan looked up, his face pallid. “Currier had been talking about direct manipulation of the markets. Nobody ever thought he could accomplish it.”

“Well, he did.”

“Have you seen it work?”

“Yes. Believe me. It works. I was the one who tampered with Coca-Cola.”

“I read about that. It was chalked up to a glitch.”

“It wasn’t,” Doug said.

“It doesn’t matter,” Jonathan said as he put his hand up to his forehead and looked down at the deck. He sat silently for a long moment, and Doug began to notice the sounds of the waves lapping at the boat and seagulls whirling about in the sky. Kand was still.

“He’s going to crash it,” Jonathan said.

“What do you mean?”

“If this database can really do what you say it can, he’s going to use it to bring down the whole system.”

“But it’s not that powerful,” Doug said. He was being hopeful. He already knew it could probably do just that.

“Not by itself,” Jonathan said. “He has plotted this kind of thing before. This would just be part of it. A more powerful part of it.” He sat in silence for a few more minutes.

“He couldn’t have. He couldn’t have!”

“What?” Doug asked.

“Currier has set up his network.”

“Network?”

“Currier was always well-connected. His circle includes a lot of brilliant and successful people. Some of them were part of the Free Majority.”

“So are they all in on something?”

“If they are, it will probably work. He just needed the last part. The database.”

Doug and Kand looked at Jonathan wide-eyed. “What will work?” Doug asked.

“You couldn’t know. See, Currier always wanted to set up a network of people in high places. Banks, Government, Media. Just a few people was all it would take,” Dad sat up now. “They were plotting to crash Wall Street.”

“Why? What would this accomplish?”

“Turmoil. He’s always been an anarchist. In his view, the free market should take care of everything. He wanted to build the first working anarchy.”

Kand finally spoke. “But a market crash would be the antithesis of the free market’s purpose.”

Jonathan looked at him. “Yes, it would be a cruel irony. But Currier thinks it would cause the government to collapse as well. Then he and his colleagues could ride to the rescue.”

“Presumably with fortunes protected,” said Kand.

“Yes. These people would all be heavily invested in precious metals. They would use their positions to control their message. They would establish private armies to keep the peace, and they would use their wealth to rebuild infrastructure and gain followers.”

“Meddling with society,” said Kand, disgusted. Doug wasn’t sure if he was angrier at Currier, the Free Majority, or his own father.

Jonathan sat back against the bulkhead again. “Oh my God, we are the only people who know what’s going on.”

“What about the Feds?” Doug asked.

“They think they’re chasing some mad bomber, not a true megalomaniac.”

“What about the Free Majority students?”

“I don’t know. But they are still our mission. Nobody else knows about them, either.” Jonathan said.

“Dad,” Doug said. “Currier said this crash plot was what you were up to.”

“I’ll bet,” Jonathan said. “He always builds a case against a scapegoat. I’m not surprised it’s me.”

“So that’s why you want to get to him first.”

“I suppose,” Jonathan said. “Doug, come finish this pumping. We’ve got to get under way.”

Doug stepped over to the rubber raft and started pumping with his foot. They had only one section to go. Kand picked up the next wooden panel.

Jonathan went to the bow and hauled in the anchor, then climbed the ladder to the cockpit, where he started up the boat. Within moments, they were gliding slowly past the Ipswich River mouth, and down toward Gloucester. They were not moving too quickly yet.

“We’re headed to New York,” Jonathan announced from the cockpit. Doug started pumping the rubber boat with his foot, and Kand found another slot for the next wooden panel. There was only one segment left. A question entered Doug’s mind; why were they pumping this thing up?

Kand and Doug finally finished filling the raft. Now that it was daylight, he took a good look around the boat. He looked up at the various apparatus above the cockpit. There was a tall CB antenna, a Raytheon GPS receiver, and a couple of other things he could not recognize. He immediately had a worrisome thought.

“Dad, do we have the GPS on?” Doug yelled up to him.

“No. No way. We are not using the radio or any other equipment on this trip,” he hollered back.

“So we can’t be tracked?” Doug asked.

“No. There is no way they could, unless you count spotting us in broad daylight.”

“Will we make it to New York?” Doug asked, worried.

“See that raft?” Dad said without taking his eyes off the horizon before them.

Doug looked down at the raft at his feet. “Yeah,” he answered.

“We’re going to stay close to the shore the whole way. It will provide you guys with a getaway.”

“What about you?”

“That reminds me,” Jonathan answered. “I saw some rods in the bulkhead store. Grab them and set them up.”

“What?”

“Here,” said Kand. He went to a storage compartment in the side of the boat and took out two fishing rods. They were huge compared to the little pond rods Doug had seen. The reels themselves were 8 inches across. They were also long, and they had to put the sections together and string them up.

Doug fumbled with the rod, but Kand was incredibly adept at it. Doug watched him carefully set the line and draw it through the eyelets. Then he easily tied a graceful looking knot to a giant hook. Doug tied a crude figure-8 to his.

The boat had a few swiveling rod holders, and Kand set his rod in it. Doug watched him, and then set his up on the other side of the boat.

“Drop the lines,” hollered Jonathan. Kand and Doug dropped the hooks until they dragged just below the surface of the water. This, at least, Doug knew how to do.

“How is this going to catch anything?” he asked. “We have no bait.”

Kand laughed.

“We’re not fishing,” Jonathan said. “That’s our cover.”

Doug started to feel stupid. His Dad was a secret spy, which had still not sunk in. Kand was just Zen or something.

He felt the boat pick up speed. Salt spray started to fly up from the bow, and the wind started to feel even colder. In the sunlight, Doug had not noticed just how cold it was out here. He decided to stand just inside the cabin, watching the ocean ply past through the spray.

On the other side of the boat, beach houses and sleepy villages scrolled past like a cartoon background. Before long, the houses became buildings, and the villages became cities. They passed the large domes of the Deer Island sewage treatment plant and crossed Boston’s main shipping lanes. The boat lurched and bounced in the chop.

The city itself rose from the haze beyond the channel. Normally at this hour, Doug would be just getting to work, hanging his jacket on the hook in his cube, and powering up the monitors. Rich would usually be there already, and would walk by on his way to get his second coffee. Doug would join him, and it would be another fifteen minutes before he was back in his cube doing actual work.

But now, he was on the run, watching the city drift by from a cabin cruiser of uncertain ownership. He had no idea

exactly what he had done to get to this point, and he was not sure how he would get out.

Doug noticed Kand standing out on the open deck, staring at the city as he was. Doug wondered what he was thinking.

“Been awhile,” Kand said, as if he could read Doug’s thoughts.

Doug nodded. Kand had not seen this city in a month. Doug wondered what had happened to his store, his stuff. He realized he had been mean to Kand the previous night, and it was no excuse that he was tired.

“Kand,” Doug said. “That stuff you were talking about last night, about the Grid.”

“I wish you would not call it that,” Kand sighed.

“Sorry,” said Doug.

“What about it?”

“You said that global balance would bring other civilizations up to our level, but would also bring ours down.”

Kand paused. “Well, the notion of ‘up’ and ‘down’ implies a bias toward progress. All cultures are equal.”

“So a large city like this one is really the same as a medieval village.”

“Despite different technological levels, that is right.”

They felt the boat turn a few degrees toward starboard. Doug was perplexed. “But isn’t balance a good thing. Isn’t it best to seek constant improvement?”

Kand shook his head and gave Doug a look like he had heard this before. “Only for those who profit from it.”

“What?”

“This trend called globalization is really just the tendency of the powerful to fulfill their needs using the cheapest resources they can find.”

“But they are also spreading a better way of life, with higher standards, aren’t they?”

“Standards. That word describes the problem well. A higher standard by one measure is a lower standard by others. Not every civilization values television and automobiles like you do. It makes them no less civilized.”

“But how do people live one way if they know about other possibilities?”

“They accept their way, because their values and histories are not just learned. They are bred. They are proud of their lives and their ways.”

“Aren’t they really just scared of change, then?”

“There is fear, yes, but the trend to homogenize everything is the bigger threat. It forces all civilizations to adapt faster than they would normally.”

“But the possibilities are so huge today. We have faster methods of travel, of communication. We know so much now.”

“Your civilization is thoroughly invested in it. That is why you speak like this. You are bred this way. You are told you must be like the other kids, like your neighbors. And so must other nations.”

“But what about innovation? Being different?”

“These are part of the myth. And many civilizations don’t share it. In reality, neither do you. America is very much a homogenized society.”

“But we are always taught individuality.”

“And you act on it by buying huge houses, small cell phones, fast cars. Being the same as everybody else.”

Doug was silent. He had definitely been thinking about fast cars.

“All the Grid does,” Kand continued, “is define the basic needs. It does not preach for or against globalization, but the roots are in the middle for a precise reason. A civilization must be stable. Growth must occur in each category, not one or a few.”

“So the Free Majority uses the Grid out of order.”

“I would argue that their version more accurately describes this country, but it is much more dangerous.”

Doug heard a sound out on the deck. He walked out there to see what it was.

“Guys,” yelled Jonathan from the cockpit. The sound he heard was his first call to them.

“What’s up?” Doug asked.

“We’re headed out toward the Cape. I don’t want to deal with the canal. I’d have to use the radio.”

“Okay,” Doug said. “That’s it?”

“That’s it.”

The air was a little warmer now, so he stood out on the deck with Kand. The shore was much smaller, and they still could not see any land ahead. This was about as far into the open ocean Doug had ever been.

He sat down to think about the Global Grid. Kand sat on the opposite bulkhead. He was right, in a way. Doug had been tracing the path of millions or people just like him. He had gone to college, got his good job, bought the toys he was supposed to have.

Doug was making a lot of money, but he wasn’t saving much. He was living in a posh apartment for a kid his age. He and Rich spent a lot of cash in the bars on the weekends. Hell, they spent nearly thirty bucks a day just on breakfast and lunch.

He had always thought of his career progress as a given. It was the search for more. Everybody else was doing it. Why not him? He had to. Anybody standing still found themselves left behind. It had to be that way with countries, too. At least he had always thought that.

Was he ignorant, Doug wondered. He knew he had more education than a lot of people, Kand included. If he didn’t have that, maybe he would have made different choices. He might have thought about things differently.

Doug had been taught to embrace progress and strive to keep up with the Joneses. It was working. Until now. It wasn’t easy learning that your entire lifestyle was part of a great myth.