DEWEY 1000

 Rex Kohler, age 23, was a fervent lover of libraries and their age-old quest to accumulate the knowledge of the world for the benefit of humanity.

 He was currently working on his Master's degree in Library Science at San Jose State University in California. One day, while working on a research paper for his thesis, he came across an obscure article in the publication *Library Journal* from August, 1975.

 Covering discussion topics exclusively for librarians from the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom, the journal mentioned continued professional interest in a rumor that there was a special codex of three unusual -- and probably very old -- volumes hidden somewhere in six remote libraries around the world. These never revealed copies were referred to as being catalogued under the mysterious tag: *Dewey 1000.*

 This was indeed curious, as Rex knew, because the Dewey Decimal Classification system (DDC) only ranged from 000-999. Also known as the Dewey Decimal System, this elaborate library classification system was first conceived and then published in 1876 by noted librarian Melvil Dewey in Massachusetts. It is now used by more than 200,000 libraries in 135 countries, primarily in public libraries and schools. [There is another classification system -- the Library of Congress Classification system (LCC) -- which is used mostly by academics, such as colleges and universities, and other research facilities.]

 Rex decided to ask his degree advisor, Dr. Stephanie Tustin, if she knew anything about the legend of *Dewey 1000.*

 "Oh, that... That's been a wild rumor for around fifty years in library discussion circles. I think it is merely somebody's 'pipe dream,'" she admitted. "But the idea is still fun to ponder, don't you think? I mean, what librarian wouldn't want to find some secret texts somewhere and then reveal them to the world?"

 Kohler's imagination was sparked, however, so he brought up the topic of *Dewey 1000* with his fellow graduate students. Most had never even heard of it, or if they had, they dismissed it with a snort or a laugh. When bringing up the same topic with his other professors after class, Rex learned that they had vaguely heard of the legend, but that everyone thought the existence such a secret codex was impossible.

 "For example, what language would such a 'universal' text be in?" one professor speculated. "That evidence alone would prove it was a fake."

 "What could these three entries be written upon? Stone, clay, papyrus, vellum, or paper? What writing could be preserved long enough to survive so many millennia?" another professor offered.

 A third professor remarked, " The DCC has only been around for about 150 years. How could a supposedly ancient text possibly be labeled *Dewey 1000*? It doesn't make any sense."

 Rex Kohler was undeterred. In his free time, he emailed selected libraries around California, then expanded his search to several other states. He always asked the same burning question: "Can you tell me anything you might know about something called *Dewey 1000*?"

 But all of his inquiries came up blank. In fact, two-thirds of the libraries didn't even bother to respond!

 Kohler then decided to contact by telephone the Library of Congress in Washington, DC. The nation's most esteemed Librarian was its director, Dr. Conrad Beloit. The Library of Congress was one of two of the largest libraries in the world (the other being the British Library in London), with over 173 million items collected from around the globe in more than 470 languages. Rex was granted a precious fifteen-minute appointment over the phone three days from now, at a specific time by Beloit's secretary, so he anxiously waited.

 "Well, Mr. Kohler -- or may I call you Rex? -- your question is certainly a curious one. I haven't thought about that rumor -- or legend, if you will -- for many years. Most of my colleagues completely dismiss the existence of anything remotely referred to as *Dewey 1000.* However, I have one possible lead I can share with you. There is a famous author named Chantal Jerroux. She's of French-Canadian ancestry, and earned her Ph.D. in World History at Yale, but she chose to become a writer rather than a professor. She penned a dozen or so history best-sellers. I also seem to remember her writing a very brief, unpublished manuscript wherein she admitted seeing the tri-codex of *Dewey 1000* in some city library in central Brazil, sometime in the 1970s. By the way, she was also the person who first dubbed this unusual find as *Dewey 1000.* Give me some time, Rex, and I'll call you back. I need to relocate and reread her exact manuscript."

 Kohler agreed and patiently stayed by his cell phone. A little over two hours later, Dr. Beloit called back.

 "Hello, Rex? It's Conrad...O.K., here's what I found: Chantal's account was both very strange and quite remarkable. Jerroux said that the three ancient volumes she saw were unreadable because they were written in some unknown script, except for their titles in English -- which 'miraculously' (in her words) appeared when she touched them, then vanished again when she removed her fingers. She reported the titles as being: *The Book of Wonder, The Book of Fear,* and *The Book of Mystery.* They were Dewey classified by her as 1000.1, 1000.2, and 1000.3, because they fit in no other library material category. The volumes were secretly stored in a locked wooden chest in a basement, which a Brazilian woman librarian was at first reluctant to open and share its special contents, until she recognized Chantal's name as that of a world-renowned author. Jerroux also added that the tri-codex's were uniquely inscribed on some kind of strange, thin metal plates -- each 0.5 cm. x 30 cm. x 20 cm., with seven plates affixed together per volume."

 "Is this author still alive, Dr. Beloit? Do you think I could see her?" Rex pleaded, barely containing his growing excitement.

 "The last I heard, Rex, was that Chantal Jerroux was living at home on Nantucket Island, off Cape Cod. She had a serious stroke two years ago and is still in hospice care. I think she must be in her early 90s by now. So if you want to see her, I would do it sooner rather than later," Conrad advised.

 Kohler effusively thanked Dr. Beloit and ended their call (after Conrad wished Rex good luck with his graduate studies, saying "You have all the makings of an excellent future librarian...I applaud your pluck and zeal!"). Rex next looked up at his dorm room wall calendar, and was reminded that Spring Break was just a week away. He immediately decided to book a flight to Boston, then rent a car and drive the ninety minutes to Cape Cod. From there, he would take the regular ferry to Nantucket Island from Hyannis and try to meet with the ailing author Chantal Jerroux.

 Would she see him? Would her physical and mental acuity be strong enough to sufficiently answer his questions? Rex could only hope.

 Kohler did some informational digging, and was assured that, once he got to the island, the locals would be able to direct him to Chantal's house -- Nantucket being a small island where everybody basically knew everybody else. He figured he would humbly show up without any kind of appointment, sheepishly explaining that he didn't have Jerroux's phone number -- but could he please just have thirty-minutes of her time?

 The following week, on his JetBlue, non-stop, 'red-eye' flight from San Jose to Boston, Rex finished reading his last of three of Chantal's history books (the other two having been read back in his dorm room the last few days) between dozing off during the six-hour trip. This preparation would give him some basic familiarity regarding Jerroux's personality, her historical theories, and her depth of scholarship -- which he found to be quite formidable. He figured that such familiarity would be a useful basis for an initial, cordial conversation.

 The sea was rather rough for the ferry ride from Hyannis to Nantucket, but it only had to be endured for an hour. The brisk salty air, though, was invigorating whenever one stepped out on the swaying, windy deck.

 Once on the island, Rex was very impressed. He saw a remarkable community preserved much like a time capsule -- with many stately 19th Century homes lining old cobblestone streets. These had once been owned by whaling ship captains, and were built when Nantucket was the lucrative whale oil capitol of the world -- before being eclipsed by the use instead of cheaper petroleum for fuel and lamps. The quant vistas and leafy shade trees gave the whole place the peaceful look of a classic Currier & Ives lithograph.

 Stepping into the Nantucket Pharmacy on Main Street, Kohler asked the portly, white-haired, pink-faced pharmacist if he knew the address of the famous authoress, Chantal Jerroux.

 "Oh sure, young fella...she lives at the corner of Orange and West Dover Streets. Look for a charming green and white house...ya can't miss it...take ya about a fifteen-minute walk from here. I see ya got one of her books there in yer hand...hankerin' for her autograph, eh?"

 The cheerful man kindly gave Rex the simple directions. Kohler noticed that the New England speaking accents here on the island were slightly different from those he had briefly heard in Boston at Logan Airport.

 He easily found the house. Steeling up his courage, Rex boldly walked up the flower-lined brick pathway to the front door and rapped its large brass door knocker.

 A stout but matronly black woman wearing a white apron answered his call.

 "Yes? How may I help you?" she asked. Rex noted her rich Jamaican accent, having once spent a low-cost Spring Break briefly vacationing on that Caribbean island with his girlfriend, Andrea.

 "Sorry to disturb you, ma'am, but I wonder if I could speak to Chantal Jerroux for a few moments?" He politely introduced himself. "I didn't have her phone number to call in advance, or I would have made an appointment. You see, I have come all the way from California to speak with her, regarding a very important library matter -- a project I am working on for my Master's Degree in Library Science." Kohler hoped that this last 'white lie' sounded sincere and convincing.

 "Well, young man, you need to know that Miss Jerroux is in poor health. I'm Lillian, her hospice caregiver and house keeper. She went down for her nap about an hour ago after eating lunch. I'll see if she's awake now and able to see any visitors. Please wait here in the parlor while I check."

 Rex breathed a sigh of relief that he wasn't refused outright. He looked around the room at its tasteful antique furniture, its huge oriental floor rug, its framed paintings of nature landscapes, and attractively arranged house plants.

 Lillian returned a moment later.

 "Good news...Miss Jerroux is awake and will see you. But given her condition, I must limit your visit to no more than a half-hour. Please follow me, Mr. Kohler. And may I offer you a nice sandwich or a cup of tea?"

 Rex politely declined the refreshments, frankly being too excited and somewhat nervous. Lillian led him up a grand staircase to a bedroom on the second floor of the house.

 Chantal was sitting in her wheelchair next to her bed and nightstand, the left side of her wrinkled face slightly drooping. She was unmistakably very old and looked somewhat shrunken with age, almost childlike. She had light grey hair with white streaks in it, fitted up in a bun. Her seated body was tilted likewise to the left. She was wearing comfortable powder-blue cotton pajamas. The room smelled of baby powder and some kind of skin lotion. But the author's emerald green eyes behind her bifocals were alert and filled with energy as she smiled, both features catching Rex somewhat off-guard.

 "Thank you, Lillian. I'll be alright now. You may go." Miss Jerroux spoke with a slow but firm voice, her words slightly slurred from her stroke two years ago.

 "Yes, Miss, I'll be back to fetch Mr. Kohler in a half-hour. Ring your bell if you need anything before that time is up." Lillian gracefully departed.

 "I see you brought one of my books, the one about the Moslem Golden Age. Did you enjoy it?" Chantal began.

 "Very much, Miss Jerroux. I especially liked your analysis of how the rise of Islam contributed to many scientific advancements over 500 years, but then gradually declined -- with Islam unlikely to ever regain its preeminence in science."

 "Thank you for that compliment, Mr. Kohler. It is always heartening for an old person like myself to know that the younger generation still finds my work relevant and useful." Chantal coughed a bit, then took a sip from a water glass on her nearby nightstand, which was within reach from her wheelchair, next to a large brass hand bell.

 "Now, young man, I understand you are working on a project for your library graduate degree. Specifically, how can I help you today?"

 "I want to know about your Brazilian experience with seeing the mysterious *Dewey 1000* texts. Exactly what happened?"

 Chantal paused a moment, looked Rex carefully in the eye, then took a deep breath before answering.

 "The year was 1973. I was doing research for my latest book -- this time, on the history of the Incas and their contentious relationship with the native tribes of the Brazilian rain forest. I wound up in the large city of Cuiaba, Brazil -- first, at its Federal University of Mato Grosso, then at their main public library. At the library, I met the director, Dr. Izabel Duarte. She recognized my name and face from my books, which were happily on the shelves there, naturally in their Portuguese translations.

 After helping me find some necessary research materials -- I didn't understand her Portuguese language, but fortunately, she also spoke Spanish, which I likewise knew, so we were able to communicate -- Izabel asked if I wanted to see something very unusual in the basement of the library. That's when I saw them."

 "*Dewey 1000*?" Rex asked, in awed suspense.

 "Yes, that what I called them off the top of my head. I guess the label has stuck, yes?" She dryly chuckled. " I had never seen anything like them. They certainly didn't fit into any DCC 000-999 classification. Izabel had them stored in a locked wooden chest in the center of the room. They were very strange, and seemed very old -- but not in a decrepit way. I can only describe them as 'otherworldly.' Definitely not something found originally on our Earth."

 Chantal Jerroux paused, and looked away, remembering back. Rex had raised his eyebrows in surprise at her last comment, his eyes staring intensely. Then the renowned authoress resumed her account.

 "There were three volumes, inscribed on thin metal plates -- but unusual plates which mysteriously resumed their flat, rectangular shapes even after being folded in quarters or rolled up by Dr. Duarte. The inscriptions -- odd geometric patterns made up of various lines and arrows, triangles, circles, and quadrilaterals -- were somehow fused into the silver metal, not raised so you could feel them with your fingers, as would be true of an etching or carving or cuneiform. When I touched one of the plates, its title came 'alive' in English: *The Book of Wonder*. But none of the text below the title translated itself. Next, I touched a second plate -- *The Book of Fear* -- and finally, the third -- *The Book of Mystery*. Yet, when Izabel stepped up and touched them after me, the titles appeared for her in Portuguese, not in English!"

 "Exactly how did those plates wind up there? Rex then asked.

 "According to Dr. Duarte, a local farmer was working in his maize field when he stumbled upon them, lying there on the ground, as if they had simply fallen from the sky. Assuming the 'silver' was valuable, he took them to a local coin dealer to try and trade them for cash. The dealer was unsure of dealing with such bizarre items, however, so he referred the man and his rare find to the Federal University. But the farmer discovered that on the way to the University, the metal plates were mysteriously 'pulling' him to Izabel's city library instead. He told Dr. Duarte upon arrival that it was as if a huge and powerful, 'invisible magnet' was drawing him to her place, but against his will. He was relieved to get rid of them, he confessed to Izabel when he left, fearing that they were somehow cursed -- or even the work of the Devil. Izabel told me that she carefully put them in a wooden chest in the basement and locked it. She later confessed that I was the first person she had ever showed them to -- fearing others would simply think her crazy."

 "That's quite a story!" Rex exclaimed. "What happened next?"

 "Well, Izabel then showed me something truly remarkable. She took one of the seven-sheet volumes and moved it to the far end of the basement. She placed them on the cement floor and stepped back. Suddenly, the plates levitated and moved by themselves back to the spot of the wooden chest! Like magic. Then Izabel explained that she had earlier learned, quite by accident, that her library building happened to be located at the exact geographical center of the continent of South America. Merely a coincidence? The plates were precisely here for a reason, she then theorized. She next surmised that perhaps there were identical plates located at the exact geographical centers of the remaining five habitable continents on our planet...thus, a total of six sets. Izabel guessed that the plate volumes were possibly placed here on Earth long ago by *visitors from an alien civilization*. She was, understandably, as I said, afraid to share what she experienced with anyone -- that is, before telling me everything.

 So now you know why I never formally published my manuscript describing my incredible experience. People would think me delusional or insane. I did, however, tell some friends and several authors and a few librarians my entire story, which is how the word got out, since then, as either a rumor or a wild, fantastic tale."

 Lillian then knocked and came into Miss Jerroux's bedroom, and announced that Rex's allotted thirty minutes visiting time was up. It was just as well, for Chantal was visibly spent from her almost non-stop verbal exertions, Rex noticed.

 "It was so nice to meet you, Mr. Kohler," Miss Jerroux said, summoning up enough strength to say good bye. "I hope I was helpful for your project. Good luck in grad school. And you might like know that the closest place to check on the existence of any other *Dewey 1000* volumes is in the exact geographical center of North America. It's a place rightly called The Heart of America Library. You can find it in Rugby, North Dakota."

 Lillian escorted Rex out of the room after he shook Chantal's withered hand and emotionally thanked her. He thanked her gracious Jamaican caretaker as well upon exiting the front door. She surprised him with a paper sack.

 "I have a son back in Kingston about your age. He was always hungry, so I made you a takeaway lunch. Just a ham sandwich, an apple, a cookie, and a nice cold bottle of cranberry juice. Enjoy! Take care and drive safe, Mr. Kohler..." Lillian grinned a warm, wide smile.

 Young Kohler had been astounded at what he had learned thus far! Leaving Nantucket Island on the ferry back to Hyannis, he returned to his rental car and drove back off Cape Cod to Boston. At his budget hotel near the Charles River, he went on the internet and researched the other exact geographical centers of the continents of Europe, Africa, Asia, and Australia. Here is what he found:

 Kremnica, Slovakia;

 Kisangani, Central African Republic;

 Kyzyl, in Tuva, Russia;

 and Alice Springs, in the Northern Territory.

 He would contact them via email tomorrow morning and ask if they happened to have the mysterious *Dewey 1000* metal plate volumes. Having never been to Boston before, Rex Kohler went out in the pleasant Spring weather and walked the campuses of both Harvard and M.I.T. to relax. Later, he ate a hearty dinner at a nearby seafood restaurant, and finally collapsed -- exhausted -- in bed back at his hotel for a long and much needed sleep...

 Using the Google Translate app on his phone after breakfast the next day, he composed emails in Czech, Swahili, and Russian, asking the specified cities if their central library had heard of (or hopefully, possessed) the mysterious *Dewey 1000* volumes. He emailed the same request in English to Australia. Then he booked a flight on Delta from Boston to Minneapolis, with a connection to Minot, North Dakota. Minot was sixty-five miles west of Rugby, where Kohler would visit the Heart of America Library. Rex would therefore get another Budget rent-a-car and drive an hour east from the airport.

 Rugby was a farming community of 2500 people, with a main line from the Great Northern Railroad passing through it. Rugby prominently featured a 15-foot tall stone obelisk in its center, proudly declaring itself to be the official geographical center of North America.

 Kohler went directly to the library. It was a cooler and more windy day than he had known in Boston. Plus, he could smell the rich, newly plowed earth around the area.

 Mrs. Ana Lindgren was the head librarian. After introducing himself and his intentions, Rex was at first rebuffed, with the suspicious librarian denying knowing what he was talking about. But when Kohler allowed that he had just visited Chantal Jerroux on Cape Cod, and relayed all that she told him regarding *Dewey 1000*, Ana relaxed and quickly took the young graduate student down into the library's basement.

 There, in a locked steel file cabinet, were the strange metal volumes. Mrs. Lindgren took them out. Rex was amazed! He touched the top of one of the volumes with his index finger. It transformed its title into shimmering English: *The Book of Wonder.*

 "Now, watch this..." Ana directed. She started speaking Swedish aloud for about a minute -- a melodic poem she had once memorized as a girl. Then she touched the same volume cover. It immediately changed to the title: *Undrans Bok*.

 "And if you move any of the plates anywhere else in the room, they levitate and return to their resting spot by the file storage cabinet. It was at first rather terrifying, to be honest," the baffled librarian admitted. She then demonstrated the strange effect for her visitor, who was clearly amazed too.

 "Have you had any experts or metallurgists test the metal?" Rex inquired.

 "Yes. I asked some scientists from Minot State University to come to examine the plates, but only on the condition that remain strictly quiet about both their visit and their results."

 "What did they find?"

 "They used various instruments to examine it. Carbon-dating was out of the question. So they tried to burn a tiny corner of one plate with sulfuric acid, and later, also with an acetylene torch. It was unchanged -- completely impervious! They slammed the metal with a hammer, tried to drive nails through it, tried to scrape it, everything. But nothing could harm it. They were even able to roll it up, and then to fold it into quarters, but it miraculously went back to its original flat shape after both contortions.

 Their conclusion? The metal was absolutely not from our world -- and although the metal appeared in pristine condition, the silver plates were, in fact, most likely, very old."

 "Did anyone think to notify the U.S. Military or our Government officials? Maybe the plates were part of a secret research project -- just as some believe that the whole UFO phenomenon is actually a covert government program and subsequent cover-up," Rex offered.

 "I did, after talking with our local authorities both here in Rugby and at the ND state level. They swiftly contacted Washington, but the reply from the Feds was that the plates had to brought to them for examination. Yet, as you saw with your own eyes, that was impossible, seeing as the plates cannot be moved from their present position. Just like I demonstrated to you," Ana explained.

 "One more question, please. How did you obtain these mysterious plates?"

 "I found them early one bitter winter morning when coming to work, about sixteen months ago. They were resting by the front door here -- no explanation, no note. And, despite the temperature, the plates were warm to the touch."

 Rex thanked Mrs. Lindgren, and told her he would stay at a nearby hotel for another day or two and keep in touch, at least until his Spring Break week was over and he had to return to San Jose, CA.

 Back at his room at the Days Inn, he checked his emails. He heard back from the libraries in the designated geo-centered cities he had contacted in Europe, Asia, and Australia -- but not yet from Africa. Rex was thrilled that each library reported that they indeed had the three *Dewey 1000* plate volumes in secure storage -- but that they were still mystified and unsure exactly what to do about them.

 Kohler returned to his University classes the following Monday. He then reported all he had learned to his academic advisor, Dr. Stephanie Tustin, and asked permission to change his amazing quest for *Dewey 1000* into his official Master's thesis. She enthusiastically agreed. Rex graduated with honors eighteen months later, and happily accepted a head librarian position in Half Moon Bay, on the Pacific Coast in the Bay area, after becoming engaged to his girlfriend, Andrea. But not a day went by when he didn't imagine what those strange metal plates had to -- one day -- reveal to humanity...

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 It took a team of expert C.I.A. codebreakers and mathematicians two full years to finally decipher the first volume of the *Dewey 1000* tri-codex -- specifically, *The Book of Wonder*. They were forced to set up their decoding computer equipment in the basement of the Heart of America Library in Rugby, with encrypted satellite links relaying data back and forth to C.I.A. headquarters in Langley, Virginia.

 The American President at the White House was interrupted during a routine Cabinet meeting by the director of the C.I.A. on a misty, foggy morning the first Friday in April.

 "Mr. President, I believe you need to read this file immediately," Cameron Keen advised. "It is the first, complete translation of the *Dewey 1000* volume called *The Book of Wonder* that I had earlier briefed you on."

 The President excused his Cabinet and Director Keen, and retired alone to the Oval Office. He slipped on his eyeglasses, opened the file stamped with the red letters EYES ONLY, and began reading while still standing up in front of his large Executive desk. When he was done, he put the file down, removed his glasses, and rubbed his shut brown eyes.

 "Oh, my God..." he said aloud, his subdued voice echoing faintly in the empty, historic room.

 THE END

 by Jack Karolewski

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