

# Chapter One

In Chapter One, the narrator reflects on their interview for a high-security job they've never been qualified for before. The interviewer, Adela, Vice Secretary of "Expatriation," has an eye patch and hay-like blond hair, and abruptly asks about the narrator's Cambodian heritage, specifically referencing their mother as a refugee. This leads to a discussion about the terminology used for displaced people; Adela prefers the term "expats" despite the implication of their traumatic history. The conversation reveals that the narrator's mother, though a refugee, never identified herself as such, emphasizing the complexities of identity intertwined with cultural expectations.

As the narrative progresses, it is revealed that the British government has developed time travel, planning to extract individuals from historical moments of crisis—wars and epidemics—yet doing so only as a method to prevent altering history. The narrator is to serve as a “bridge,” assisting these “expats” as they adjust to contemporary life. This unorthodox project intends to maintain their human rights while tracking their adjustment under monitoring.

The narrator expresses their excitement for the job, feeling stagnant in their position as a translator specializing in Southeast Asia. They recall their early childhood ambitions shaped by their mother's aspirations for them. However, the job aligns more with their heritage and the skills they've developed. Tension arises among the staff regarding terminology, highlighting the philosophical implications of how language shapes identity and perception.

The meeting shifts to an urgent briefing about their first expat, Commander Graham Gore, a figure from the 19th century. He arrives with a distinct presence, struggling to comprehend the world he's been thrust into after being extracted from historical circumstances.

Gore, who is grappling with modern life, embodies a transitional figure, both literally and metaphorically. The narrator introduces him to contemporary customs and technology, leading to moments of humor and reflection on societal changes. As they bond, the juxtaposition of their vastly different backgrounds unfolds, fostering humor and discomfort, which navigate the complexities of historical trauma and modern identity .