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Serge De Brook

The Nine Seals

An Intelligent Conspiracy Thriller



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**The Nine Seals. An Intelligent
Conspiracy Thriller**

«Издательские решения»

Brook S. D.

The Nine Seals. An Intelligent Conspiracy Thriller / S. D. Brook —
«Издательские решения»,

A letter in his own handwriting. A secret order that has kept the world in balance for centuries. And a question he will eventually have to answer out loud: who does silence really serve?

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The Nine Seals

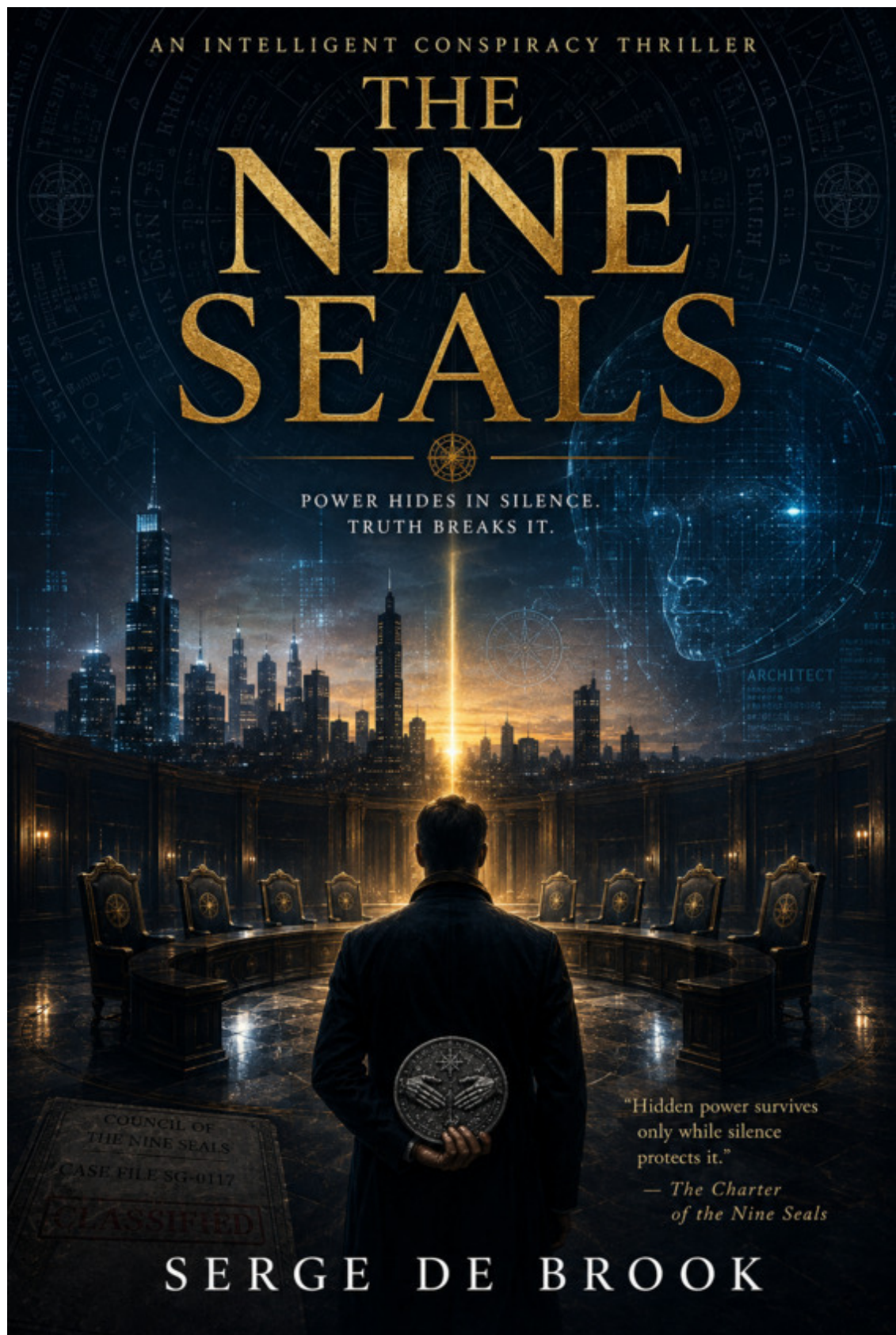
An Intelligent Conspiracy Thriller

Serge De Brook

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FICTION NOTICE

This is a work of fiction.

Any resemblance to actual persons, institutions, governments, organizations, technologies, or historical events is purely coincidental within the fictional universe of the Sovereign Kingdom of Manna.

CLASSIFIED DOSSIER

COUNCIL OF THE NINE SEALS

CASE FILE SG-0117

STATUS: RESTRICTED

ACCESS LEVEL: ASH SEAL OR HIGHER

CLEARANCE REQUIRED

WARNING

Unauthorized access to this dossier constitutes a violation of the Charter of the Council of the Nine Seals.

Distribution, duplication or disclosure without authorization is prohibited.

The first mistake every investigator makes is believing a file begins where its first page begins.

This one does not.

ARCHIVAL NOTE

The following material was reconstructed from multiple classified archives after the Sovereign Kingdom of Manna terminated every known financial coordination mechanism associated with the organization internally referred to as the **Council of the Nine Seals**.

Several documents appear to have been written years before the events they describe.

Others were recovered from repositories whose existence has never been officially acknowledged.

One memorandum bears the signature of a man who had already been dead for eleven years.

Authenticity cannot be confirmed.

Forgery cannot be proven.

Proceed only if you accept one possibility:

Some conspiracies are dangerous not because they are hidden...

...but because they are intelligent.

PROLOGUE

The Letter That Should Never Have Existed

There are moments when a person's life divides into two irreconcilable histories.
The first is the one recorded in public archives.
The second begins with a single envelope.
Mine began on a quiet autumn morning in Sandton.
The envelope bore no return address.
No postal mark.
No government seal.
Only my own handwriting.
Perfectly reproduced.
Perfectly impossible.
For several long seconds I simply stared at it.
Every curve of every letter belonged to me.
Every habit of the pen.
Every hesitation before the capital "K."
I knew with absolute certainty that I had never written it.
And yet I also knew something far more disturbing.
Whoever had.
Knew me better than I knew myself.
I should have destroyed it.
Instead...
I opened it.

The letter contained only one sentence.

"If you are reading this, then someone has finally decided that you are ready to discover who truly governs the balance."

At the bottom stood my own signature.
Written eleven years before I would supposedly write it.
That was the moment I stopped believing that history was merely something people inherited.
Sometimes...
History chooses its own witnesses.

Part I — “The Invitation”

“When kings seek answers in the stars, and nations in gold, only one will hear the call:

“The meaning is not outside the world, but in the heart of man.”

— From the Chronicles of the Sovereign Kingdom of Manna

I often thought: what is meaning?

It is sought in books, in gold, in victories. Prophets and sages promise it. But when night falls and you are left alone with yourself, meaning slips away like a drop of water between your fingers.

I am the Duke of the Sovereign Kingdom of Mann. My people look to me as the one who should know the way. But the further I lead them, the more clearly I see my own blindness. The grandeur of a title does not alleviate the emptiness. Power brings no peace.

Sometimes I stand and look at the horizon. The earth is silent, the stars twinkle, but my heart asks: where are we going? We talk about the future, about progress, about light — but what if these are just words covering up fear?

One night, as the wind was driving ragged clouds across the sky, an old man came to me. His clothes were simple, his eyes glowed with a quiet fire. He said:

“You seek the path, but you look outward. The meaning is not outside the kingdom. It lives within you.”

I was silent. And for the first time I realized that deep within my soul there was a world about which I knew nothing.

That evening marked the beginning of my pilgrimage. Not to foreign lands, not to new cities, but to the land that reveals itself only to those who dare to look within themselves.

Where there are no maps, no troops, no power. There is only the heart and its response to the eternal question: what does it mean to live wisely?

Chapter One



The Invitation

INTERNAL MEMORANDUM No. SG-0117

COUNCIL OF THE NINE SEALS

Classification: INTERNAL

Access Level: ASH SEAL

Distribution: Authorized Personnel Only

Subject: Jan Kowalski

Status: Observation Recommended

Background Assessment

The subject demonstrates an unusually stable pattern of independent judgment under institutional pressure.

Repeated exposure to political influence has not altered core decision-making behavior.

Subject consistently prioritizes long-term systemic stability over immediate personal or political gain.

Probability of voluntary recruitment: **Low**

Probability of successful initiation through conventional methods: **Below acceptable threshold**

Alternative protocol authorized.

Protocol: *The Invitation.*

Sandton, Johannesburg

The envelope was waiting on his desk long before he arrived.

No receptionist remembered accepting it.

No courier had signed the delivery log.

The building's security cameras showed nothing unusual-only an ordinary morning inside the Ministry of Science and Innovation.

Yet there it was.

Perfectly centered on the polished walnut desk.

Waiting.

Jan Kowalski paused in the doorway.

Years spent in government had taught him that truly dangerous things rarely announced themselves dramatically.

They appeared quietly.

Professionally.

As though they had every right to be there.

This envelope possessed precisely that confidence.

Cream-colored.

Heavy archival paper.

No postage.

No official seal.

Only his name.

Written in his own unmistakable handwriting.

His heartbeat slowed instead of quickening.

Fear made people careless.

Curiosity made them observant.

He walked around the desk without touching the envelope.

The office overlooked Sandton's financial district, where towers of steel and glass reflected the pale African morning. Markets were opening. Traders hurried beneath him carrying laptops and coffee. Somewhere below, billions changed hands before breakfast.

Everything looked reassuringly normal.

The envelope did not.

He reached for it.

The paper felt older than it should have.

Almost warm.

He turned it over.

The seal consisted of nothing more than a small circle of dark gray ash, perfectly pressed into the paper without wax or glue.

When his thumb brushed the mark, it crumbled instantly.

Inside lay a single sheet.

No letterhead.

No signature.

Only one sentence.

There are questions your office can never answer. If you wish to ask the right ones, come alone. Midnight. St. Gabriel's Chapel. Burn this invitation after reading.

Below the sentence appeared a signature.

His own.

Dated eleven years earlier.

Jan read it twice.

Then a third time.

His rational mind immediately began constructing explanations.

Forgery.

Psychological manipulation.

An elaborate intelligence operation.

An academic prank.

Each possibility sounded increasingly implausible the longer he looked at the page.

The signature was perfect.

Not merely visually identical.

Personal.

Every microscopic hesitation of the pen.

Every unconscious pressure change.

Every tiny imperfection unique to his writing.

Someone had not copied his signature.

Someone understood how he wrote before he did.

A discreet knock interrupted his thoughts.

"Minister?"

His assistant, Elena Marchesi, stepped into the office carrying the day's briefing folder.

She noticed his expression immediately.

"Everything all right?"

Without thinking, Jan folded the page.

"Just another anonymous letter."

She smiled.

"You've become important enough to collect those."

He almost laughed.

Almost.

Because for the first time in many years, he found himself wondering whether importance was measured not by those who watched you—
— but by those who had been waiting for you all along.
He slipped the letter into the inside pocket of his jacket.
Outside, Johannesburg continued its ordinary day.
Inside the Ministry, meetings began.
Budgets were approved.
Research grants were signed.
Scientific programs moved forward exactly as planned.
Yet throughout every conversation, every document, every decision, his thoughts returned to a single impossible fact.
Someone had written to him...
using his own hand.
And somewhere beneath the city, if the letter was to be believed,
someone was waiting.

CHAPTER TWO



The Chapel of Ashes

CLASSIFIED ACCESS RECORD

COUNCIL OF THE NINE SEALS

ARCHIVE ENTRY: SG-0117-A

Location: St. Gabriel's Chapel

Status: ACTIVE

Observation Directive: Passive

Personnel Authorized: None

Historical Note

The chapel appears in no official registry of the Kingdom of Manna.

Municipal archives list the structure as demolished sixty-three years earlier.

Satellite imagery confirms its continued physical existence.

No explanation has been recorded.

Midnight had a way of making even familiar streets appear borrowed from another city.

Jan Kowalski drove alone through Sandton, leaving behind the illuminated towers of finance for neighborhoods where the city seemed to remember an older rhythm. Traffic disappeared. Glass skyscrapers gave way to stone walls, iron gates, and avenues lined with ancient jacaranda trees whose branches reached across the road like silent witnesses.

The invitation lay folded inside his jacket.

He had tried to destroy it twice.

First with a paper shredder.

The blades jammed.

Then with a lighter.

The flame died the instant it touched the page.

The paper remained untouched.

By eleven fifty-eight he stood before the chapel.

It was smaller than he had imagined.

Built of weathered granite, the structure carried no cross, no bell tower, no sign identifying its denomination. Moss climbed its walls as though nature itself had attempted to reclaim it and failed.

One lantern burned beside the entrance.

No electric light.

Only fire.

Jan checked his watch.

00:00.

The heavy oak door opened before he reached it.

No one stood inside.

Only darkness.

A voice emerged from somewhere beyond the entrance.

"Minister Kowalski."

It was calm.

Cultured.

Neither male nor female.

"You arrived precisely on time."

"I don't recall accepting an invitation."

"You accepted the moment you chose not to destroy it."

Jan stepped inside.

The door closed behind him without a sound.
The air smelled faintly of old paper, cedar wood, and cold stone.
Rows of empty benches disappeared into shadows.
Candles burned without flickering.
There were no religious symbols anywhere inside.
Instead, carved into the floor beneath the central dome was a circle divided into nine equal segments.
Eight bore engraved emblems.
The ninth remained empty.
As if waiting.
“You’ve been expecting me.”
“We have been observing you for considerably longer than you imagine.”
Jan remained standing.
“I prefer to know who I’m speaking with.”
“So does everyone.”
Silence settled between them.
Not uncomfortable.
Measured.
Finally the unseen voice spoke again.
“My name would explain nothing tonight.”
“It might explain why someone forged my handwriting.”
“No forgery occurred.”
The reply came so matter-of-factly that it momentarily disarmed him.
“You wrote that signature.”
“I most certainly did not.”
“Not yet.”
For the first time that evening, Jan felt uncertainty replace skepticism.
It was a sensation he disliked.
“You expect me to believe I signed a letter eleven years before writing it?”
“No.”
The voice answered immediately.
“We expect you to investigate why you eventually will.”
A faint mechanical sound echoed beneath the stone floor.
Almost imperceptible.
Like gears that had not moved for centuries.
Then the center of the circle began to glow.
Not brightly.
Softly.
Ash-gray light emerged from the empty ninth segment.
Dust lifted from the ancient stone, swirling upward in perfect silence.
Jan instinctively stepped back.
“What is this?”
“The question,” the voice replied,
“is considerably more important than the answer.”
The stone beneath the circle separated almost invisibly.
A hidden platform descended into darkness.
Far below...
something was awake.
Blue light pulsed once.

Then again.

Slow.

Steady.

Like the heartbeat of an intelligence that had waited generations for someone to arrive.

“Welcome,” the unseen voice said quietly.

“...to the Nursery.”

Jan looked into the darkness.

Every instinct told him to leave.

Every question he had ever carried told him to continue.

He took the first step downward.

Behind him...

the chapel disappeared into silence.

CHAPTER THREE



THE NINTH CHAIR

“The most dangerous throne is not the one everyone desires. It is the one no one has dared to occupy for a century.”

— From the Hidden Statutes of the Council of the Nine Seals

INTERNAL MEMORANDUM 03-Δ

COUNCIL OF THE NINE SEALS

Office of the Cardinal-Regent

SUBJECT: The Vacant Chair

Classification: ASH SEAL OR HIGHER

Archive Note:

The Ninth Chair has remained vacant for **103 years**.

During that period:

- Seven attempts were made to appoint a successor.
- None reached a formal vote.
- Three candidates disappeared before the ceremony.
- Two withdrew without explanation.
- One died the night before the oath.
- One submitted a written refusal consisting of a single sentence:

“The Chair is not empty. We simply cannot see who sits there.”

The original document was removed from the archive. No record exists identifying who removed it.

[RESTRICTED]

Morning arrived without bringing clarity.

Jan Kowalski sat alone in his ministry overlooking Sandton. The city below had already awakened-traffic streamed between towers of steel and glass, financial screens flashed their relentless numbers, and somewhere beneath the orderly rhythm of government, millions of ordinary lives unfolded without the slightest awareness that an invisible architecture might be quietly shaping their future.

He envied them.

On his desk lay the Ash Seal.

Since returning from St. Gabriel’s Chapel, he had locked it inside the lowest drawer, wrapped in ordinary brown paper as though bureaucracy itself could suppress whatever power the object possessed.

It had failed.

Every night he dreamed of the chamber beneath the chapel.

Every morning he awoke remembering another detail.

The floor.

The symbols.

The silence.

Most of all...

...the empty chair.

His intercom interrupted the thought.

“Minister?”

“Yes?”

“You have an unexpected visitor.”

“I don’t remember approving one.”

“You didn’t.”

A pause.

“He insists you will.”

The man waiting outside looked entirely forgettable.

Grey suit.

Grey tie.

Grey hair.

No security escort.

No identification badge.

Only calm eyes that seemed strangely familiar.

“Your Grace.”

Jan frowned.

“I don’t believe we’ve met.”

“We haven’t.”

“And yet you know who I am.”

“I know what you have become.”

Jan felt an involuntary tightening in his chest.

“I’m afraid I don’t understand.”

“No,” the stranger answered gently.

“Not yet.”

They walked without destination through the ministry gardens.

Neither spoke for several minutes.

Finally, the stranger stopped beside a weathered stone fountain.

“Tell me,” he asked.

“What disturbed you most inside the chapel?”

Jan answered immediately.

“The machine.”

“No.”

“The ritual.”

“No.”

“The oath.”

The stranger smiled almost sadly.

“You noticed the chair.”

Jan froze.

“You were there.”

“I was not.”

“Then how-”

“Because everyone who survives the First Initiation remembers the chair.”

A long silence settled between them.

Finally, Jan asked the question he had been carrying since leaving the chapel.

“What exactly is the Council?”

The man looked toward the skyline.

“The wrong question.”

“What is the right one?”

He turned back.

“What is it protecting?”

Jan had expected conspiracies.

Secret governments.

Ancient bloodlines.

Financial empires.

The answer was somehow more unsettling.

“The Council protects balance.”

Jan almost laughed.

“Balance?”

“Yes.”

“Between whom?”

The stranger’s expression became unreadable.

“That,” he said quietly,

“is precisely what no one has agreed upon for nearly four hundred years.”

He reached into his coat and removed a small leather notebook.

Its cover bore no title.

Only an embossed symbol of **nine concentric circles**.

“I believe this belongs to you.”

“It can’t.”

“It already does.”

Jan opened it.

Every page was blank.

Except the last.

There, in neat handwriting unmistakably his own, were six words.

Do not sit in the Ninth Chair.

His hands began to shake.

“I never wrote this.”

“I know.”

“Who did?”

The stranger looked at him for a long moment.

Then answered with absolute certainty.

“You will.”

A cold wind swept through the garden.

When Jan looked up again-

the man was gone.

No footsteps.

No departing vehicle.

Nothing.

Only the notebook remained in his hands.

He stood alone beside the fountain, staring at the impossible sentence.

For the second time in as many days, his own handwriting had warned him about a future he had not yet lived.

And for the first time...

he wondered whether someone was trying to save him-

or simply making certain he walked exactly the path already chosen for him.

CHAPTER FOUR



THE HALL OF ECHOES

“Every institution eventually forgets why it was created. The dangerous ones remember only how to survive.”

— The Hidden Commentary on the Charter of the Nine Seals

CONFIDENTIAL ARCHIVE ENTRY SG-0041

COUNCIL OF THE NINE SEALS

Central Repository

Classification: OBSIDIAN SEAL

Subject: Architectural Irregularities — Repository Level Minus Seven

Engineering Assessment

During restoration work conducted over the past eighty-one years, surveyors repeatedly reported inconsistencies between the official architectural drawings and the actual underground structure.

Documented anomalies include:

- Corridors appearing where no corridors exist on any blueprint.
- Rooms whose dimensions exceed the external geometry of the building.
- Acoustic reflections inconsistent with known physical laws.
- Witnesses independently describing identical locations that cannot later be found.

Commission Recommendation:

No further structural investigations are authorized.

The Repository shall henceforth be treated as a **living historical structure** rather than a conventional building.

Reason for Recommendation: Classified.

[ACCESS DENIED]

Jan Kowalski returned to the Repository three nights later.

No official invitation had arrived.

No handwritten envelope.

No anonymous visitor.

Only silence.

And somehow...

that silence felt deliberate.

The elevator descended far below the levels he had visited before.

Minus Three.

Minus Four.

Minus Five.

The indicator continued downward without slowing.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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