

Masters of Nicholas

By

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Chapter 1: First Strike

Five strikes pierced the blackness of the Universe. They streaked through the silence of space in parallel formation like blue lightning. Moving at speeds beyond capture of the human eye, they suddenly split apart and moved in different directions. Their targets would soon be reached with unerring accuracy.

The northern region of the Earth was dark. The blue flash sliced through the atmosphere and struck deep within a wintry forest surrounded by low mountains. As if guided by a sculpture's hand, the blazing blue light molded the landscape. A village, complete with stone cottages of assorted sizes, took shape around a hollow circle of stones. The blue light swept over each completed cottage then retracted. It settled into the center of the stone circle and transformed itself into a blue flame.

Master Nohab Nicholas opened his eyes slowly and looked around. He sat safely inside the largest of the cottages and rested comfortably on his simple, wooden throne. He was still groggy from the journey, but content to see that all seemed to have arrived in order. The Yulseer, with an image of the Earth across the face of its orb, turned slowly in its golden base. He raised his hand towards his chest and grasped the item that hung from the gold chain around his neck.

"The key." Master Nohab Nicholas smiled sleepily and tightened his grip around the golden key that hung from his neck. His fingers followed the familiar swirled and engraved lines. "All seems to be in place. There will be much to do in the morning." Keeping his hand firmly around his key, he fell back into a contented sleep.

"How can this be?" a voice called out.

The sun had just reached over the tops of the mountains and cast the first rays of light over the newly formed village. The inhabitants of the cottages had gathered around the blue flame and stood waiting for Master Nohab Nicholas to appear. The master did not leave them waiting long. The door to his cottage opened, and he stood before the gathering of questioning eyes. Dressed in a red robe tethered at the waist by a golden rope, his warm, brown eyes were undisturbed by the

scene of confusion. His long, brown, curled hair and equally long, brown, curled beard peeked out from beneath his red hood.

“I know you have many questions.” The dozens gathered began shouting at once, but the master raised his hand for silence. “Know that all has gone as planned. This new world is strange, but we are not strangers to each other. There will be much to do and to learn in the days ahead.”

“But we have lost our memory!” a young woman shouted out. The rest of the group nodded in agreement. “It’s as if we have no past.”

“The masters thought it best.” Master Nohab lowered his arms flatly for calm. “Memories before this moment will not serve us. We have all that we need, here.” He paused and pointed his finger toward the ground where he stood. “You will all come to know the quest before you. We are all Nicholases, and the Nicholas magic is within each of us and in our keys.”

Some of the Nicholases nodded, but some were still uncertain. It was true that each Nicholas stood with a golden key that hung from a golden chain. Brown, curled hair, in varying lengths, framed their kind, brown eyes. They looked as any other inhabitant on their new planet, but they possessed a special gift.

“The blue flame will keep us warm and fuel our magic,” Master Nohab continued.

“Do you remember, Master Nohab?” a Nicholas asked, “Do you remember our past?”

“I remember that which must be remembered, and I can say no more.” The master averted his eyes. He did not wish to deceive, but he was bound by the rules of his position as master. “Come! There is something I wish to show you.”

He motioned for the group to follow. They marched quietly behind him and entered the large cottage of the master. They gathered inside and circled the Yulseer. Calm settled as they gazed at the large, rotating globe. It was unfamiliar, yet they felt the importance of its presence.

“The Yulseer will answer our questions.” Master Nohab swept his hands over the slowly moving orb. “And it will choose the few that will travel as Givers.”

“Givers?” a chorus of voices called out.

“We are the Givers!” The master pointed to himself and then spread his arms to encompass those in the room. “It is the reason why we were chosen to take this journey.” The master spoke with increased excitement, and his eyes began to twinkle. “This world is new: 550 AD by their primitive calculations. The people of this world have much to learn and few skills, but they have great dreams. Twelve men of Nicholas, chosen by the Yulseer, will travel into this world. They will deliver the gift of the heart’s desire to those hearts deemed worthy.” The master sat down on

his throne and slapped his knees. “Why, we will guide the hearts of men to create, to invent, and to explore. That is our magic and that will be our gift.”

“What if we fail?” a young man stepped forward and questioned.

“We will fail, at times.” The master rubbed his beard, and a small frown turned down his lips. “For as much as there is light in the hearts of the people, there is darkness, too.” He took his key in hand and held it tightly. “The heart can be treacherous, even for the wisest of magic.”

A young woman walked to the master’s side and placed her hand softly on his sleeve. “But, will we ever go home again?”

“I truly do not know,” Master Nohab answered and looked directly into her eyes. “This is our home, now.” He patted the hand that rested on his arm. “And we are all part of the families of Nicholas.”

Nights fell and dawns broke, turning the days into months. The people of the Village of Nicholas, as it was simply named, busied themselves with their new surroundings. A garden, impervious to the cold and the snow, was started. The seeds of the Snonoble Fir, carried by Master Nohab in his pocket, were also planted. The magnificent pines, when they grew, would reach heights of over three hundred feet and offer much needed protection from the cold, northern winds. A large barn was built to house the Yakut horses who were most welcome and necessary transportation for the journeys ahead.

“Come and see your new home.” Lera Nicholas gently guided the first Yakut horse toward the barn while the rest of the horses waited patiently in the corral. She wrapped her scarf tighter around the brown curls of her head and shivered. “I wish I could be as warm as you.” The sweet-tempered creature walked without resistance. Covered in a dense coat of thick and wooly hair, the Yakut horses stood barely five feet in height. Their stocky build and layered hair kept them resilient against the bitter temperatures. Once inside the barn, Lera patted the horse, removed its reins, and allowed it to roam freely. Smiling, she turned to get another from the corral.

“Do you need some help?” a young man asked, standing at the entrance to the barn. He was dressed in green-plaid wool with heavy-duty brown boots on his feet and a cap on his short, brown curls.

“What are you doing here, Teemo?” Lera stopped at the entrance and placed her hands on her hips. “I thought that the men were supposed to be with the Master for the choosing of the Givers?”

“Oh, I was there.” He scuffed his shoe against the cold ground. “The Yulseer didn’t pick me.”

“Not this year.” Lera touched his sleeve with her mittened hand. “Maybe next year. Besides, I need your help with the horses. You did offer.”

Teemo nodded. One by one, they moved the horses into the barn. It didn’t take long and as Lera watched the contented horses, Teemo slipped his arm around her waist.

“Come on, Lera,” Teemo pulled gently. “Let’s get some hot chocolate. I’m not used to this cold air, and I could use something to warm me up. Join me?”

Lera looked up into Teemo’s face and smiled. Together, they walked arm in arm toward the entrance, but Lera suddenly stopped.

“Wait.” She spun around and faced the inside of the barn again. “There’s something I want to show you.”

Teemo followed as Lera weaved her way through the meandering horses. She continued past the low-stacked feed pile against the side walls of the barn. Finally, she reached the back of the barn, stopped, and pointed.

“You helped to build this barn, didn’t you?” Lera asked. Teemo bobbed his head up and down. “Why do we need this door at the back of the barn if there is no door on the front? It’s a rather large door, don’t you think? And why does there need to be a lock?” She pointed again at the over-sized lock deeply inset into the door.

Teemo stepped closer to examine the strange door. He rubbed his brown beard which was in the early stages of growth and reached just past his chin. “I’ve never noticed this door before, either.”

The wooden and iron enforced door seemed to be much taller than was needed to bring horses through. It was almost twelve feet tall and mounted with heavy hinges. Teemo reached his hand out and turned the iron handle. The handle didn’t budge and neither did the door.

Preparations lasted for some time as the twelve chosen Nicholases readied for their first journey into their new world. The day of departure dawned cold, but sunny. The horses stood packed and ready by the blue flame with their riders mounted and waiting for instruction. The entire village gathered around them not knowing what to expect. Master Nohab walked solemnly to each rider, spoke a few quiet words, and patted their horse in seeming approval.

“Riders, follow me,” Master Nohab began, motioning and moving toward the barn. “The rest of our village may join us, as well.”

A caravan formed with Master Nohab at the lead. He moved swiftly through the entrance of the barn, with the riders behind him, followed by the rest of the village on foot.

“Look,” Lera whispered, as she followed with Teemo at her side. “He’s heading straight for the door in the back. The Master must have placed it there.”

They reached the back of the barn, and Master Nohab lined the riders up, one behind the other, facing the strange door.

“Walen Nicholas,” Master Nohab addressed the first rider. “Please dismount, and place your key,” he continued, pointing his finger toward the door, “into the lock.”

Walen Nicholas did not ask any questions. He slid from his horse, took his key in hand, stretched the golden chain as if it were made of rubber, and fit the key perfectly into the lock. He did not turn it, and instead, waited for approval. The Master nodded, and Walen turned the key easily.

“Please, get back on your horse.” Walen removed his key and jumped back onto his horse.

Master Nohab lowered the door handle, now freed from its locked position, and opened the heavy, creaking door. There were piles of snow in front of the opened door as a wisp of wind sent a shower of snowflakes inside the barn. Lera looked and wondered. *Where could the riders possibly go?* Had the Master made a mistake?

“You understand what you must do and your quest is clear?” Master Nohab asked, staring up at the rider. Walen nodded.

When the Yulseer chose a Giver, the quest was made known to the Giver only. Even the Master did not know the quest, but could follow each Givers progress in the Yulseer.

“Then direct your horse through and return when your task is complete,” Master Nohab instructed Walen. “You can return through any locked door of your choosing or on foot through the mountain pass. Your key will know the way back home. Go through, now.”

Walen nudged the sides of his horse and moved through the open door. Everyone watched as he and his horse disappeared as they passed through the doorway. There were gasps as Master Nohab shut the door.

“Where did Walen go?” shocked voices called out.

“To the destination determined by the Yulseer and guided by his key,” the Master said. Whispers rustled through-out the barn like the sound of autumn leaves in the wind. “He is quite safe, and I will be watching over him in the Yulseer. I will watch over all of our Nicholas travelers. Arnto Nicholas, you’re next.”

The remaining eleven riders faced the door and passed through, just as the first. Teemo strained his neck to watch the riders walk through. *It must be magic*, he thought. Once the riders stepped through the doorway, they were gone, leaving only the familiar piles of snow. The last

rider passed through, and Master Nohab closed the door behind him. He tested the handle on the closed door. It didn't move and was locked securely.

"Can my key do that?" Lera asked, holding up her key in her hand. "Take me to another place by unlocking a door and walking through?"

"Within reason," Master Nohab said, joining Lera's side. "The key is wise, but one must still be careful. Our thoughts, combined with the magic of our key, can take us to an unexpected place. Come." The Master raised his cloaked arm like a staff to move them as a shepherd guides his flock. "Let us celebrate with a great feast. Our twelve Nicholases are the first of many who will deliver our gifts to the people of this planet. May our gifts be received and well used."

"When will they return?" a voice called out.

Master Nohab had just reached the entrance to the barn, but stopped. "They will return," he said, facing the families of Nicholas, "when each has delivered their one gift."

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<https://www.amazon.com/dp/b07zzm8h66>

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Masters Of Nicholas is the Prequel to **Benjamin Nicholas & The Golden Key:**

A Lonely Boy. A Mysterious Mountain. Will a Golden Key Unlock Hidden Magic?

Benjamin Nicholas is an only child being raised without a mother and by a father who ignores him. When a strange boy named Kalto arrives, he tells Benjamin he belongs to a magical family: the Nicholas Family. The magic is in a key, but Benjamin doesn't have it. They must travel deep within a mountain to the Nicholas World of Sankelves. On their journey, Benjamin discovers a world full of wonders and secrets. Will Benjamin find the key and who else seeks its magic?

Benjamin Nicholas & The Golden Key is the first book in SC Crovo's Benjamin Nicholas Children's Fantasy Series. Cherished legends, magical creatures, young heroes, and dark villains, will pull you into the magical worlds of SC Crovo's New Benjamin Nicholas Series!

Benjamin Nicholas and the Golden Key is available NOW on Amazon:

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