

*By the Author of*  
**ALL THE LIGHT WE CANNOT SEE**  
*WINNER of the PULITZER PRIZE*

**C C L O U D**

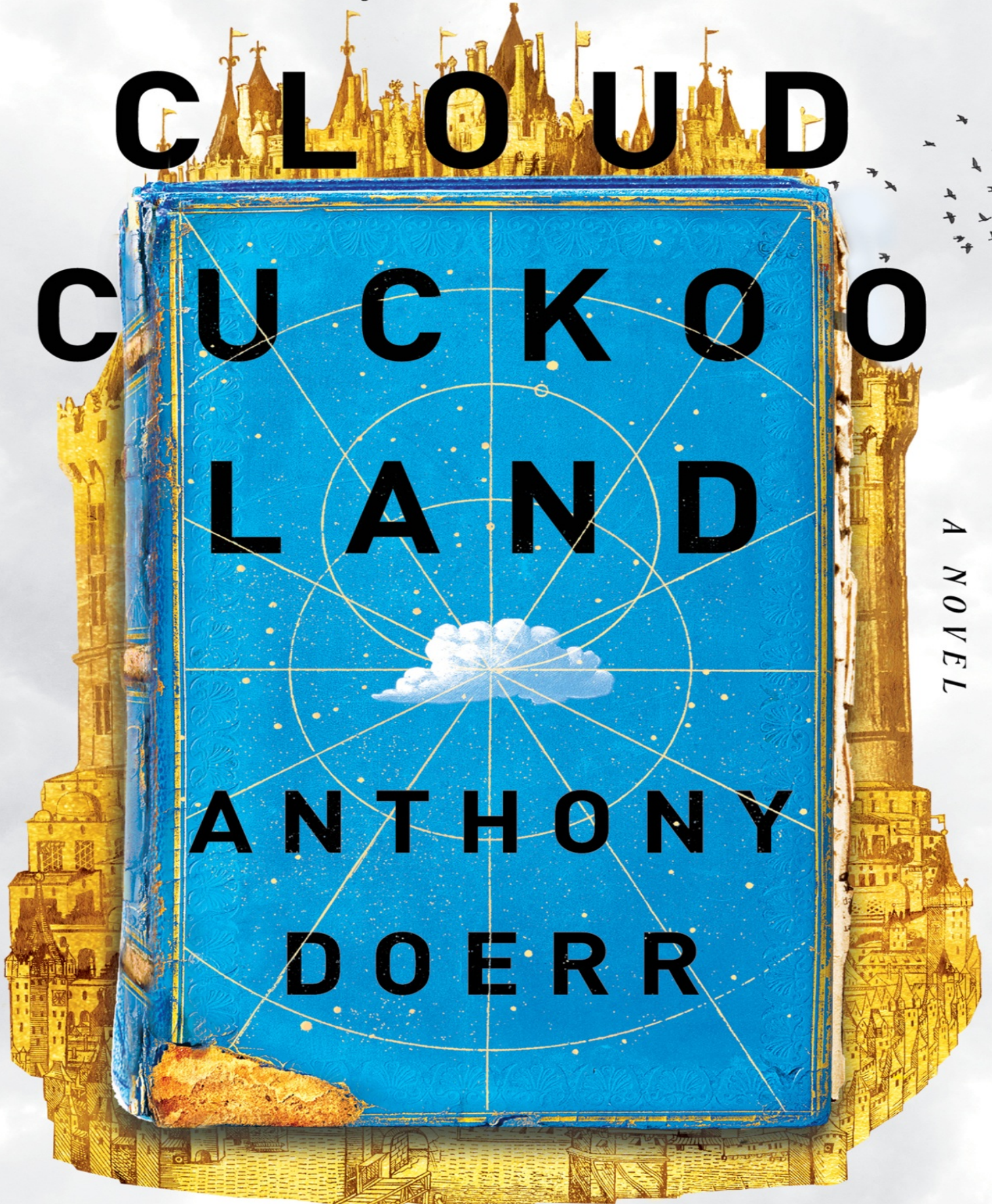
**C U C K O O**

**L A N D**

**A N T H O N Y**

**D O E R R**

A NOVEL



**CLOUD  
CUCKOO  
LAND**

**A NOVEL**

**ANTHONY  
DOERR**

**SCRIBNER**

**New York London Toronto Sydney New Delhi**

*For the librarians  
then, now, and in the years to come*

Chorus Leader: To work, men. How do you propose to name our city?

Peisetairos: How about Sparta? That's a grand old name with a fine pretentious ring.

Euelpides: Great Hercules, call my city Sparta? I wouldn't even insult my mattress by giving it a name like Sparta.

Peisetairos: Well, what do you suggest instead?

Chorus Leader: Something big, smacking of the clouds. A pinch of fluff and rare air, a swollen sound.

Peisetairos: I've got it! Listen—Cloud Cuckoo Land!

—Aristophanes, *The Birds*, 414 B.C.E.

# **PROLOGUE**

**TO MY DEAREST NIECE WITH HOPE THAT THIS  
BRINGS YOU HEALTH AND LIGHT**

# **THE ARGOS**

**MISSION YEAR 65**

**DAY 307 INSIDE VAULT ONE**

# Konstance

**A** fourteen-year-old girl sits cross-legged on the floor of a circular vault. A mass of curls haloes her head; her socks are full of holes. This is Konstance.

Behind her, inside a translucent cylinder that rises sixteen feet from floor to ceiling, hangs a machine composed of trillions of golden threads, none thicker than a human hair. Each filament twines around thousands of others in entanglements of astonishing intricacy. Occasionally a bundle somewhere along the surface of the machine pulses with light: now here, now there. This is Sybil.

Elsewhere in the room there's an inflatable cot, a recycling toilet, a food printer, eleven sacks of Nourish powder, and a multidirectional treadmill the size and shape of an automobile tire called a Perambulator. Light comes from a ring of diodes in the ceiling; there is no visible exit.

Arranged in a grid on the floor lie almost one hundred rectangular scraps Konstance has torn from empty Nourish powder sacks and written on with homemade ink. Some are dense with her handwriting; others accommodate a single word. One, for example, contains the twenty-four letters of the ancient Greek alphabet. Another reads:

In the millennium leading up to 1453, the city of Constantinople was besieged twenty-three times, but no army ever breached its land walls.

She leans forward and lifts three scraps from the puzzle in front of her. The machine behind her flickers.

*It is late, Konstance, and you have not eaten all day.*

"I'm not hungry."

*How about some nice risotto? Or roast lamb with mashed potatoes? There are still many combinations you have not tried.*

"No thank you, Sybil." She looks down at the first scrap and reads:

The lost Greek prose tale *Cloud Cuckoo Land*, by the writer Antonius Diogenes, relating a shepherd's journey to a utopian city in the sky, was probably written around the end of the first century C.E.

The second:

We know from a ninth-century Byzantine summary of the book that it opened with a short prologue in which Diogenes addressed an ailing niece and declared that he had not invented the comical story which followed, but instead discovered it in a tomb in the ancient city of Tyre.

The third:

The tomb, Diogenes wrote to his niece, was marked *Aethon: Lived 80 Years a Man, 1 Year a Donkey, 1 Year a Sea Bass, 1 Year a Crow*. Inside, Diogenes claimed to have discovered a wooden chest bearing the inscription, *Stranger, whoever you are, open this to learn what will amaze you*. When he opened the chest, he found twenty-four cypress-wood tablets upon which were written Aethon's story.

Konstance shuts her eyes, sees the writer descend into the dark of the tombs. Sees him study the strange chest in the torchlight. The diodes in the ceiling dim and the walls soften from white to amber and Sybil says, *It will be NoLight soon, Konstance*.

She picks her way through the scraps on the floor and retrieves what's left of an empty sack from beneath her cot. Using her teeth and fingers, she tears away a blank rectangle. She places a little scoop of Nourish powder into the food printer, pushes buttons, and the device spits an ounce of dark liquid into its bowl. Then she takes a length of polyethylene tubing, the tip of which she has carved into a nib, dips her makeshift pen into the makeshift ink, leans over the blank scrap, and draws a cloud.

She dips again.

Atop the cloud she draws the towers of a city, then little dots of birds soaring around the turrets. The room darkens further. Sybil flickers. *Konstance, I must insist that you eat*.

"I'm not hungry, thank you, Sybil."

She picks up a rectangle inscribed with a date—*February 20, 2020*—and sets it

beside another that reads, *Folio A*. Then she places her drawing of a cloud city on the left. For a breath, in the dying light, the three scraps seem almost to rise up and glow.

Konstance sits back on her heels. She has not left this room for almost a year.

**ONE**

**STRANGER, WHOEVER YOU ARE, OPEN THIS TO  
LEARN WHAT WILL AMAZE YOU**