

# PART ONE

It's the loss of the Grail that sets us out  
on the Quest, not the finding.

—Martin Shaw, *The Snowy Tower*

The Lord saw that the wickedness  
of man was great in the earth,  
and that every intention of the thoughts  
of his heart was only evil continually.

—Genesis 6:5

## CHAPTER

# 1

It took six hours to get to the Grand Canyon from LA despite the fact that Ken drives like a crazy person, and by the time we arrived at the hotel it was late afternoon and everyone was very hot and extremely ready to not be in the car anymore. The Kenmobile is a big old Lexus SUV bought in better times, but with five people's bags and Pierre's extensive collection of camera and lighting equipment—the majority of which, I'm convinced, is superfluous for any function unrelated to Pierre's ego—four of us spent the long, hot drive in moderate discomfort. Ken's insistence on playing loud progressive rock from the 1970s did not make the time pass any faster, though I'll admit there was an hour of unrelenting desert toward the end when it lent the experience an epic Kodachrome grandeur.

The hotel was twenty miles from the canyon, and pretty new and perfectly okay. Two wings of identical rooms on three floors, open-plan lobby in the middle with a half-decent restaurant and airport-style bar, surrounded by parking lot and desert. Ken defaults to this kind of place—it's Molly who arranges the bookings, but with anything involving expenditure you can bet he made the judgment call—because they're cheap and have loyalty programs that feed points back to the company credit card. Ken's chief skill as a producer/director is to pinch each penny until it begs for mercy. Without this talent the show wouldn't have made it to the web in the first place, and it was even more crucial now that we had the steely eye of a cable network overseeing every

aspect of production, and so I'm grateful, I guess. I'm also glad this kind of crap isn't my problem, because I'd be hopeless at it—but that doesn't stop me wishing that, once in a while, we could base operations somewhere with views over something other than asphalt.

We tumbled out of the SUV into the lot and stretched and muttered and burped. The team:

Ken—late fifty-something (and pointlessly evasive on the precise number), paunchy, face like an old pug, thinning black hair. Came over from England way back (quite possibly on the run from the authorities), punched his way up through commercials and music videos and produced a few horror movies in the early '90s that made some actual money. These days *The Anomaly Files* is all he does, and he does not stint in making comedic play over how far this shows his star has fallen.

Molly—assistant producer—twenty-eight, confidently attractive in generic Southern California style, destined for better things. Surgically attached to her iPhone, never without a binder, usually smiling in a way that says it really will be better for all concerned if you just do what she says.

Pierre—midtwenties, pointlessly good-looking, our cameraman. I don't know why he's called Pierre. He's not French. His parents aren't French. He can't speak French and (I checked) has never even been to France. It's annoying. Pierre is convinced he's on the fast track to Hollywood and one night when he's annoyed me even more than usual I'm going to tell him I've been there and it's not as much fun as it looks. But not yet, as the most annoying thing about Pierre is that he works hard and is genuinely talented, certainly a lot more so than the past-it journeymen who'd normally accept this type of gig. Plus he has rich parents and comes with his own high-end gear and so Ken loves him, insofar as Ken's capable of loving anyone who isn't actively handing him either money or a drink.

Finally, a temporary addition to our merry band, a woman I'd met for the first time that morning when the Kenmobile picked her up from a bland little house in Burbank. Mousy, pale, a neohippie type in floaty

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multilayered clothes with hemp shoes and an ankh necklace. I was still struggling to address her as Feather, though that appeared to be her actual name.

And then yours truly, of course.

But that's enough about me.

Molly led the way into the hotel and supervised check-in. Ken went first, naturally. Once processed, he told Molly to get his bag sent up to his room and announced that he'd see us all in the bar in an hour—at which point he marched straight over to it, to do an hour's predrinking. His dedication in this regard is legendary.

Pierre and Feather went next, and wandered off toward the elevators together, Pierre draped in black canvas tech bags. Theoretically he brings them inside to stop people stealing the gear from the car, but I suspect the primary intention is to show off his gym-muscle arms as he hefts them to and fro.

I finally stepped up to the desk next to Molly and smiled at the registration clerk. "Hey, Kim," I said, reading the name from her badge. "How's your day?"

She frowned, which was not the desired effect. After a moment, however, it became clear she was trying to place me, and then that she had. "Whoa," she said. "You're that guy."

"That guy?"

"Yes," she said. "You are. The YouTuber. That archeologist guy. Unsolved mysteries and stuff."

This, I should note, seldom happens. My grin in response was charming, and the accompanying shrug could have been used as a Wikipedia illustration of "self-deprecating."

"Guilty as charged," I said. "I am indeed Nolan Moore."

"Wow. My dad *hates* your show."

"Oh. Why?"

"He's an actual archeologist. Or was. Now he's a professor at NAU in Flagstaff. He's real smart. I tend to go with what he thinks."

“Good for you. Well, I’m sorry he doesn’t like the show. Can I check in now?”

She clattered on her keyboard, peering at the screen. “Actually, I don’t seem to have a reservation under the name Nolan Moore.”

“It’ll be under Roland Barthes.”

“Why?”

“Long story.” Actually, it was a fairly short story. A very successful movie actor I used to go drinking with in a previous life told me that one of the ways he’d made it seem like he was, or might soon be, famous—in the early days—was checking into hotels under an assumed name. For the mystique. Every now and then I experimented with doing the same. This encounter was not the first evidence that it was a really dumb idea, certainly outside Hollywood.

“I’ll need to see ID in that name.”

“I don’t have any.”

She looked up with an unapologetic half smile.

“Molly,” I said, “sort this shit out, would you?”

I stomped back outside to have a cigarette.

## CHAPTER

# 2

Having showered and tweeted and replied to the few nonasinine comments on the show's YouTube channel, I spent an unedifying half hour wandering the parking lot, smoking diligently and looking at the view—360 degrees of desert, sporadically enlivened by stunted shrubs; the lights of a gas station twinkling in the distance as dusk settled in. At seven I walked into the hotel bar, ready for refreshment.

Ken was holding court at a center table, Molly on the couch beside him. They stick together like glue while in production, mainly so they can shout “No” in unison every time I suggest some cool unplanned thing we could do. Feather perched on a chair opposite, looking enthusiastic in a nonspecific way. No sign of Pierre yet; presumably he was either in the gym or meditating in his room, two habits he's mentioned multiple times and for which I have not yet, miraculously, slapped him.

Ken saw me enter and held up two fingers. I glanced at the women but Molly shook her head and Feather merely smiled, not understanding the question. Of course, there was waitress service, but when Ken wants another large vodka he kind of wants it *now*, and though I'm theoretically the star of this thing, I'm generally the one expediting it. Molly is Ken's bitch for anything to do with work, but drinks aren't work, so when it comes to those she's adamant that she isn't. The complexity of the interacting hierarchies within a small group is beyond the scope of my tiny mind. I mainly just do what I'm told.

As I waited at the bar I checked out the other patrons. A few couples making plans for the next day's excursions to the canyon, a family of four peaceably chowing down on identically vast burgers, a scattering of singletons frowning at their smartphones to prove they totally weren't lonely and bored—and a trim redhead with a perky ponytail at the other end of the counter, hammering away on a laptop. She favored me with an amused smile and then pointedly looked away. I sternly ignored her while I signed the drinks to my room, so that showed *her*.

When I got back to the table, Molly was out in the lobby, pacing up and down and barking into her phone. In the run of things she's unflap-pably affable, but experience has shown that supply companies who get on her wrong side will come to regret it in profound ways.

"Fuckup with the boat," Ken said.

"Oh. What?"

"The last bunch of tourists sank it. The issue is under discussion."

"So I see."

"You sorted on your bits of shit?"

I spread my hands in a gesture of quiet confidence.

"Okay," he said patiently. "But really?"

I tapped my temple. "It's all up here."

He sighed. "That's wonderful, mate. But I'm going to suggest to you, not for the first time, that I'd prefer to see it in an actual *script*."

"Not how I roll. As you know."

"Sadly, I do. But remind me why?"

"I'm done with scripts."

"Plus you're an asshole. So there's that." He chinked his glass against mine. "Cheers. Here's to the successful and within-budget hammering of another nail into the coffin of received wisdom and the dastardly agenda of Them."

"I'll drink to that," Feather piped up, with surprising vehemence. She raised her glass and I tapped mine against it.

Pierre arrived in the bar looking annoyingly serene. Ken, Molly, and I waved at him as he approached. Pierre understood this wasn't a greeting

and dutifully changed course toward the bar. I noticed the ponytailed laptop lady glance at him as he arrived, checking out his form in a way I can only describe as “appreciative.”

Meanwhile, Feather was beaming at me. “I don’t want to sound like a fangirl,” she said, “but . . . okay, let’s face it, I’m a total fangirl. I *love* your show. What you’re doing is incredibly important, Nolan. And I want to thank you for it.”

“Well, we should be thanking *you*,” I said, disliking the heartiness in my voice.

“Happy to be able to help,” she said. “So happy.”

“I’d love to hear more about what the Palinhem Foundation actually does,” I said, trying to imply that I was on top of all but the finest details. In fact I had no clue. Our new sponsors had come directly to Ken and he’d handled the negotiations. Or more likely said yes without a second thought. He’d take cash from the NRA if they promised to keep out of his face during filming. And gave him a gun. Without the Foundation’s cash injection—and their controlling stake in the NewerWorld cable network—there’s no way we’d have this chance of the jump to a real TV show. Being conspicuously nice to Feather was high on my list of priorities over the coming days—as Ken had reminded me, many times.

“Truth,” she breathed. “That’s what we’re about.”

“Absolutely. But, uh, in what way?”

“The way *you* mean it, Nolan. What you’ve shown us time after time in *The Anomaly Files*. We need a compelling voice to fight the way scientists, the government, and the liberal autocracy have painted a misleading picture of the world and a false narrative of human history, stomping down on anything that doesn’t fit their agenda.”

I wasn’t sure what the “liberal autocracy” was supposed to be—and actually it sounded like something I should probably not be against—but smiled warmly anyway. “Right on.”

“Yeah, but seriously,” Ken said. “Where’s the money come from? Don’t think I’m not grateful, love. I’m just curious.”



“Seth Palinhem was a successful industrialist,” Feather said. She used the term as you might say “violent alcoholic.” “He died ten years back. Thankfully, toward the end of his life he realized there were bigger truths and wider horizons. He set up his foundation to fund researchers who shared his vision. This is my first big project. I’m so excited to be here.”

“And it’s a pleasure to have you,” Ken said, dutifully taking his turn to sound hearty, though I’d been there to witness his reaction when he discovered that a Palinhem representative wanted to do a ride-along on the first shoot of the new season. It had featured foul language of a breadth, inventiveness, and duration that may never be bettered in the course of human history. I wish I had it on tape.

“I only hope you’re not going to be bored,” I said. “Making TV involves a lot of waiting around.”

“I won’t be for a second, I’m sure. And I want to be helpful,” she said. “Part of the team. So what can I do? When the expedition starts?”

“Don’t worry, love,” Ken said breezily. “We’ll think of something. Just ask Molly.”

My suspicion was that “something” was going to be a master class in fetching and carrying objects of zero import, occasionally being asked for an opinion on things that didn’t matter, and generally being kept out of the way.

At that moment Molly returned and plonked herself down on the couch, looking satiated. Ken grinned at her. “So—do we have the boat we ordered?”

“No,” she said tersely. “We have a bigger and better boat. For the same price.”

“That’s my girl.”

“Different guide from the one I talked to before, but this guy’s more experienced, apparently. So that’s a win, too.”

“Nice. Though who needs a guide when we’ve got Nolan to lead the way?”

They winked at each other in a way that was doubtless intended to be amusing.

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When Pierre arrived with the drinks, I was surprised—and annoyed—to see Laptop Lady from the bar behind him. I'd seen him work fast, but this had to be a record.

"Okay," he said, however. "So, this is Gemma, who's coming with us apparently?"

"Good," Molly said. "But where's *my* drink?"

Pierre rolled his eyes and headed back toward the bar. Laptop Lady held her ground and smiled down at us, apparently unfazed at being abandoned with strangers.

Then it dawned on me. "Gemma," I said, standing and reaching out to shake her hand. "Great to meet you."

"Likewise, Nolan," she said. Her hand was cool.

She was offered a space on the couch between Ken and Molly, but took a nearby stool instead. "How come you didn't say hi when I was at the bar?" I asked.

"Heisenberg."

Ken frowned. "The bloke from *Breaking Bad*?"

Gemma laughed. "No. My being here can't help but affect the dynamic of your little team. I wanted some time to watch you before joining the group. Get a sense of you all."

Ken and I glanced at each other. His face remained expressionless, but his left eyebrow rose a millimeter: Ken-speak for *Careful with this one*.

There was chatting, more drinks, the eating of burgers and club sandwiches and fries.

"All right, you bastards," Ken said when it got to ten o'clock. He stood decisively, a bucket of hard liquor having its customary lack of effect other than making his voice twenty percent louder and causing his body to appear, curiously, ten percent wider. "Tomorrow, the adventure begins. So fuck off to bed now, all of you. Wake-ups are booked for five a.m. Be standing by the car by six or you'll be walking."

Everybody started to leave. "If you're available," Gemma said to me, "it'd be great to start getting some—"

“Not tonight,” Ken told her firmly. “Nolan’s got more important things to do.”

“Plenty of time over the next two days,” I said, trying to be charming. She smiled in a way that made it impossible to tell whether I had succeeded, and walked away.

Ken sniggered—he loves playing bad cop—and we headed out for a cigarette. “Still think that’s a stupid idea,” he said as we emerged into the parking lot.

“And I still think you’re wrong. An article about the show, on a site with a bazillion readers—what’s the downside?”

“Not all publicity is good, Nolan.”

“I’ve got final approval.”

“Of course you haven’t. All Gemma has to do is press a key on her laptop and a hatchet job will be up on the site in two seconds. By the time we get her editor to pull it down it’s already been read and retweeted.”

“By the five people who give a shit.”

“It’s more like ten these days,” he said. “You’re moving up in the world, Nolan. And I couldn’t care less about the fans. For our loyal conspiracy nuts, *The Anomaly Files* being ridiculed by a proper news site is just further proof we’re onto something. It’s a no-lose. And hardly the first time. Remember that *MediaBlitz* piece on you last year?”

“Not after all the therapy I had afterward, no.”

“Exactly. And we survived. But what I *do* care about is not fucking up the deal with Palinhem.”

“It’ll be fine,” I said.

“It needs to be a lot better than fine, you muppet.” He was looking at me seriously now. “For reasons I don’t understand but am trying not to question, the universe has thrown us a major bone here. We’ve got this one shot at cable. Blowing it is not an option. I’ll be honest, Nolan. We get bounced back to webcasts, I’m done.”

I tried to shrug this off, but he saw the look on my face.

“Sorry, mate. It’s been fun, but it’s barely keeping me in vodka and porn. I’d insist on me or Molly riding shotgun whenever you talk to that

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Gemma woman, but you'd ignore it. So repeat after me: 'I will not fuck everything up.'"

"Ken—"

"Repeat it, you tit."

I mumbled. "Won't fuck it up. Dad."

He sighed. "Go do your thing—and make it good. Then get some sleep. Lots of on-camera time for you tomorrow on the hike down. It'd be good if you didn't look deceased."

As I headed for the stairs to go up to my room, I passed Gemma and Feather waiting at the elevator.

"For the record," Feather was saying, "Heisenberg proposed the uncertainty principle. I think you meant the observer effect. Hope that helps."

Gemma blinked. Feather smiled sweetly.

I decided that I could come to like Feather.

# FROM THE FILES OF NOLAN MOORE:

THE PHOENIX GAZETTE—APRIL 5, 1909

Oldest Paper in Phoenix—Twenty-Ninth Year.

GAZETTE, MONDAY EVENING, APRIL 5, 1909

## EXPLORATIONS IN GRAND CANYON

Mysteries of Immense Rich  
Cavern Being Brought  
to Light.

JORDAN IS ENTHUSED

Remarkable Finds Indicate  
Ancient People Migrated  
From Orient.

The latest news of the progress of the explorations of what is now regarded by scientists as not only the oldest archaeological discovery in the United States, but one of the most valuable in the world, which was mentioned some time ago in the Gazette, was brought to the city yesterday by G. F. Kinkaid, the explorer who found the great underground citadel of the Grand Canyon during a trip from Green River, Wyoming, down the Colorado, in a wooden boat, to Yuma, several months ago. According to the story related yesterday to the Gazette by Mr. Kinkaid, the archaeologists of the Smithsonian Institute, which is financing the explorations, have made discoveries which almost conclusively prove that the race which inhabited this mysterious cavern, known in solid rock by human hands, was of oriental origin, possibly from Egypt, tracing back to Ramesses. If their theories are borne out by the translation of the tablets engraved with hieroglyphics, the mystery of the prehistoric peoples of North America, their ancient arts, who they were and whence they came, will be solved. Egypt and the Nile, and Arizona and the Colorado will be linked by a historical chain running back to ages which stagger the wildest fancy of the fictionalist.

A Thorough Investigation.  
Under the direction of Prof. S. A. Jordan, the Smithsonian Institute is now prosecuting the most thorough explorations, which will be continued until the last link in the chain is forged. Nearly a mile underground, about 1400 feet below the surface, the long main

fect ventilation of the cavern, the steady draught that blows through, indicates that it has another outlet to the surface.

Mr. Kinkaid's Report.  
Mr. Kinkaid was the first white child born in Idaho and has been an explorer and hunter all his life, thirty years having been in the service of the Smithsonian Institute. Even briefly recounted, his history sounds fabulous, almost grotesque.

"First, I would impress that the cavern is nearly inaccessible. The entrance is 1436 feet down the sheer canyon wall. It is located on government land and no visitor will be allowed there under penalty of trespass. The scientists wish to work unmolested, without fear of the archaeological discoverer being disturbed by curious or relic hunters. A trip there would be fruitless, and the visitor would be sent on his way. The story of how I found the cavern has been related, but in a paragraph. I was journeying down the Colorado river in a boat, alone, looking for mineral. Some forty-two miles up the river from the El Tovar Crystal canyon I saw on the east wall, stains in the sedimentary formation about 2000 feet above the river bed. There was no trail to this point, but I finally reached it with great difficulty. Above the shelf which led to the cave, on the river, was the mouth of the cave. There are steps leading from this entrance some thirty yards to what was, at the time the cavern was inhabited, the level of the river. When I saw the child marks on the wall inside the entrance, I became interested, secured my gun and went in. During that trip I went back several hundred feet along the main passage. All I came to the crypt in which I discovered the mummies. One of these I stood up and photographed by flashlight. I explored a number of relics, which I carried down the Colorado to Yuma, from whence I shipped them to Washington with details of the discovery. Following this, the explorations were undertaken.

The Passages.  
"The main passageway is about 13 feet wide, narrowing to 3 feet toward the farther end. About 55 feet from the entrance, the first side-passages branch off to the right and left, along which, on both sides, are a number of rooms about the size of ordinary living rooms of today, though some are 20 or 30 feet square. These are entered by oval-shaped doors and are ventilated by round air spaces through the walls into the passages. The walls are about 2 feet 6 inches in thickness. The passages are chiseled or hewn as straight as could be laid out by an engineer. The ceilings of many of the rooms converge to a center. The side-passages near the entrance run at a sharp angle from the main hall, but toward the rear they gradually reach a right angle in direction.

The Shrine.  
"Over a hundred feet from the entrance, in the cross-hall, several hundred feet long, in which was found the idol, or image, of the people's god, sitting cross-legged, with a lotus flower or lily in each hand. The east of the

## EXPLORATIONS IN GRAND CANYON

(Continued from Page One.)

which indicates that some sort of ladder was attached. These granaries are rounded, and the materials of which they are constructed, I think, is a very hard cement. A gray metal is also found in the cavern, which puzzles the scientists, for its identity has not been established. It resembles platinum. Straws grow in some of the floor everywhere are what people call 'rats' eyes' or 'lily eyes,' a yellow stone of no great value. Each one is engraved with a head of the Mayan type.

The Hieroglyphics.  
"On all the urns, on walls over doorways, and tablets of stone which were found by the image are the mysterious hieroglyphics, the key to which the Smithsonian Institute hopes yet to discover. These writings resemble those on the rocks about this valley. The engraving on the tablets probably has something to do with the religion of the people. Similar hieroglyphics have been found in the peninsula of Yucatan, but these are not the same as those found in the crypt. Some believe that these cave dwellers built the old canals in the Salt River valley. Among the pictorial writings, only two animals are found. One is of prehistoric type.

The Crypt.  
"The tomb or crypt in which the mummies were found is one of the

contains a deadly gas or chemicals used by the ancients. No sounds are heard, but it smells snakey just the same. The whole underground institution gives one of shaky nerves, the creeps. The gloom is like a weight on one's shoulders, and our flashlights and candles only make the darkness blacker. Imagination can revel in conjectures and ungodly day-dreams which through the ages that have elapsed till the mind reels dizzily in space."

An Indian Legend.  
In connection with this story, it is notable that among the Hopis the tradition is told that their ancestors once lived in an underworld in the Grand Canyon till dissension arose between the good and the people of two hearts. Macchito, who was their chief, compelled them to leave the underworld, but there was no way out. The chief then caused a tree to grow up and pierce the roof of the underworld, and then the people of one heart climbed out. They carried by this way the river, which is the Colorado, and grew grain and corn. They sent out a messenger to the Temple of the Sun, asking the blessing of peace, wood and rain for the people of one heart. That messenger never returned, but today at the Hopi village at sundown can be seen the old men of the tribe out on the house-tops gazing toward the sun, looking for the messenger. When he returns, their lands and ancient dwelling place will be restored to them. That is the tradition. Among the engravings of animals in the cave is seen the image of a bear over the spot where it is located. The legend was learned by W. E. Collins, the artist, during a year spent with the Hopi Indians. There are two theories of the origin of the Egyptians. One is that they came from Asia; another that the racial cradle was in the upper Nile region. However, an Egyptologist, believed in the Indian origin of the Egyptians. The discoveries in the Grand Canyon may throw further light on human evolution and prehistoric ages.

## CHAPTER

# 3

Up in the room I drank several glasses of water, tried unsuccessfully to wrestle the air conditioner up from its subarctic setting, and sat at the desk. I had most of the blog post drafted already but I like to finesse them at the last minute. People would see the piece, no question—the newsletter has over thirty thousand subscribers, and the show has slowly clawed its way up to 93,211 Twitter followers (not that I obsessively check). Hardly stellar, but these were numbers I hoped would increase exponentially once we started going out on cable. You can bullshit all you like about how YouTube is the medium of choice for the young and smartphoned, but even a professionally produced webcast gets no respect compared to an actual network.

Ken was right. This was a big deal, and not to be screwed up. But did people care that the time and date at the top of the blog post were real? I told myself it gave the material a here-and-now veracity. And maybe it did. Or perhaps it was a question of kidding myself that I was a real investigative journalist. Either way, it needed to be done.

I rolled up my sleeves and started typing my last blog post from the world as we knew it.

**DAY 1: THE CALM BEFORE THE STORM**

I'm sitting in a hotel room twenty miles from the Grand Canyon. From my window I can see the lamps of the parking lot, and beyond it, darkness shrouds mile upon mile of the great desert: a forbidding environment that deflects mankind's gaze—and, I believe, cradles secrets waiting to be told.

It's been a long day getting here. And now, as always at the start of an expedition, I'm filled with both excitement and a sense of responsibility. I know how many of you share my conviction that the world is a far larger place than we're allowed to believe—and that access to the facts will open our eyes to the wonders of our land, our species, the entire planet . . . with its curious corners and extraordinary secrets.

So let's look at some of those facts.

On April 5, 1909, the *Phoenix Gazette*—at the time, one of Arizona's leading and most respected news sources—ran a front-page story under the headline EXPLORATIONS IN GRAND CANYON. The article details how a hunter and explorer named G. E. Kincaid came to the newspaper with a story. He told how a recent expedition—conducted under the auspices of the Smithsonian, and directed by one Professor S. A. Jordan—traveled to a spot Kincaid had previously come upon while cruising down the Colorado River (and that “down” is important, as you'll see over the next two days), prospecting for minerals in the Grand Canyon.

There, halfway up the sheer 3,000-foot wall of the canyon, Kincaid had spotted an opening. He'd clambered up and discovered that a cave lay beyond, a passageway into the rock, nearly a half mile below the current desert level. He'd explored a little, finding a few relics. These he dispatched to Washington. His finds were enough to inspire the Smithsonian to fund the expedition led by Professor Jordan.

There are other crevices in the Grand Canyon. Stanton's Cave, for example, is home not only to some striking big-eared bats but also to four-thousand-year-old twig figurines, shells, and

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beads, and ten-thousand-year-old remains of giant condors and mountain goats. Though inside this cave, the Kincaid Cavern, they didn't find mere twigs and bones.

They found . . . *wonders*.

But . . . it's getting late, and we've got an early start tomorrow. So for now I'll just urge you to read the original article (linked [here](#)), and read for yourself what they discovered. What they *claimed* to discover, at any rate—claims that have been ignored or derided by the archeological establishment ever since.

Try to decide whether this article is a piece of idle makebelieve, or if it's possible these brave and inquiring men of yesteryear uncovered evidence that North America was visited in eldritch times by another culture. Consider the question of whether the idols, artifacts, and crypt that Kincaid and his colleagues claimed to have explored in 1909—which, admittedly, no one has ever been able to locate in the century since—are mere figments of imagination . . . or if there is a great truth here.

*A truth we're not being told.*

I'll admit it's curious that the Smithsonian claims to have no record of Kincaid. No record, either, of this Professor Jordan. But as we've seen in previous episodes of *The Anomaly Files*, the Smithsonian has a long record of being tight-lipped—perhaps even of being prone to “counterfactual statements”—when it comes to any idea that contradicts the consensus the museum was established to maintain.

Questions. Doubts. A fog between us and the truth. I don't want to live my life in a fog—and from what you tell me in the comments section, and via Twitter and our Instagram page (links at the bottom), you feel the same. And so tomorrow we're going to once more cut through all this smoke and try to find evidence of the fire beneath.

*We're going looking for Kincaid's cavern.*

It won't be easy. We will be breaking the law, entering the canyon via a route that's closed to the public (and why, you might well ask, should that be?). I have spent many hours conducting



my own analysis of the original account, and as a result I'll be leading us toward a location that's quite different from where others have tried before.

Will we find the cavern? I don't know. But I *do* know this: In the search for truth, it matters not whether we find.

*It matters only that we continue to seek.*

I'd better turn in. Tomorrow the expedition starts in earnest. We'll start by hiking down to

I stopped typing and rubbed my eyes.

The fog/smoke mixed metaphor wasn't great. It needed a stirring final paragraph, and stardust sprinkled over it. It was hokey and below my usual standard. When you're selling a sense of wonder, you need to feel it.

I wasn't feeling it.

For that I needed coffee and a cigarette. The latter meant schlepping downstairs, which I decided would be a more appealing prospect if I made the coffee first and could take it with me. Let it not be said that I am incapable of long-term planning.

While I waited for the coffee to brew I corrected a few typos and then flipped over to Twitter and spent a couple of minutes replying to comments. There weren't many, because I'd done this before heading down to the bar earlier. There hadn't been many then, either.

But that was going to change. Right?

The coffeemaker started to cough like a consumptive dog, indicating it still had a minute left to go. This unfortunately gave me a little spare time. In it I did something I'd been determined not to.

I typed in a Twitter username.

The relevant homepage loaded quickly. I flicked down, feeling like an intruder, glimpsing tweets in her distinctive, direct style. I told myself that I had a very different audience but the fact was that Kristy was simply better at concentrating her messages down to tweetable length. Better at writing in general, if the truth be told.

The header image was different from last time I'd yielded to this impulse, a few weeks before. It showed her standing somewhere wild

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and cold, looking dynamic and committed—yet also down-to-earth and vulnerable.

There was a link to a recent blog post on her main site, from two days back. I couldn't face reading it, but cached the post to my phone for later, or more likely never.

I flicked back to her Twitter homepage and looked at the most recent pictures in the timeline. They were also of somewhere cold. The accompanying tweets doubtless explained where she was, and why, but I didn't read them.

I didn't need to know.

I took my coffee downstairs and stood in an especially uninteresting section of the parking lot. As a smoker you often get to see the backs of places, parts other people don't notice, the secrets hidden in plain sight. I once tried convincing Ken this was kind of a metaphor for *The Anomaly Files*, but he just stared at me for a while and then walked away.

It was very cold now, and it occurred to me that a smarter guy would have brought along a thicker sweater for the night we'd be spending in the canyon. Too late. I wish I were that guy. It must be great being him.

Halfway through the smoke I realized I could hear voices, low tones in what was otherwise silence. Sounded like a man and a woman, around the corner. She was doing most of the talking. I couldn't make out the words but the cadences sounded familiar.

It struck me that it might be the receptionist I'd encountered when we checked in. I regarded that as an unsuccessful human interaction, and I'd had enough to drink over the course of the evening that it seemed like a good idea to stroll around the corner and be affable at her.

As I walked in their direction, however, the voices suddenly stopped, as if they'd heard me coming. There was silence for a moment, then two sets of footsteps, rapidly receding.

By the time I'd turned the corner there was no one there. No telltale smell of smoke, either, or butts on the ground. Some minor hotel-based

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intrigue, most likely, and none of my business. It still left me feeling vaguely rejected and alone.

I went back upstairs, fixed my post, and submitted it. Then I went to bed and listened to the air conditioner until I eventually fell asleep.

## CHAPTER

# 4

Very early the next morning Ken strolled pugnaciously out of the hotel lobby, steaming cardboard cup in hand.

“Fuck are you looking so smug about?” he said.

I’d been there ten minutes, long enough to discover that a desert lot at 5:45 a.m. is no warmer than it is at midnight. “It’s not smugness,” I said. “I can’t move my face.”

“Bollocks. This time of day you normally look like you’ve been exhumed. By an amateur. But this morning it’s like you think you’ve discovered a reason to keep on living. Which is an illusion, incidentally. Heed the tiny demons and their wheedling voices. End it all.”

“Ken, I’m not killing myself so you can claim the insurance. We’ve discussed this.”

“Never been a team player, have you, mate.”

“I guess not.”

“Seriously, Nolan. Spill it.”

I’d been intending to keep it quiet but he clearly wasn’t going to let it go. “Got an email.”

“From?”

“The publisher.”

Ken raised an eyebrow. “‘The?’”

“My.”

He grinned like a kid and cuffed me on the shoulder, hard enough to spill half the coffee out of my cup. “Fucking fantastic, mate. Top news.”

It actually kind of was. The two books I'd produced in the last year—accounts of *Anomaly Files* investigations, featuring stills from the show along with archive photographs—had been self-published, cobbled together by yours truly and thus looking like they'd been assembled by a reasonably talented sixth-grader. The email that had arrived before I came downstairs confirmed both were being acquired by a real-life publishing house and would be coming (fairly) soon to a bookstore near you.

"They paying much?"

"Almost nothing. But that's—"

"—not the point. I know, mate. Congrats. Great boost for the show, too. Blimey. So I guess we'd better try to find this bloody cavern, then, eh?"

"Can't do any harm."

We clinked paper cups and stood in companionable silence, sipping very average coffee and watching the sky start to bloom as we waited for the others to arrive.

Molly had somehow organized a humongous thermos of much better coffee to warm up the cold, sleepy faces inside the SUV—and there's a good atmosphere at the beginning of one of these things, when it all seems possible and exciting, the tiredness and bad temper haven't yet set in, and you haven't started to really quite hate each other. Ken spared us the prog rock and there was joking and laughter along the highway, early-morning sun slanting through the windows. Feather proved good at going with the flow. Gemma seemed distant, though as her hair was still shower-wet it's possible she wasn't awake enough yet to participate. Or else this was her Observing Journalist face.

Eventually we turned off the main road and went rattling along a dusty track between twisted trees, following instructions from Molly and her trusty GPS unit. We were going to need it. Partly to navigate the very precise requirements of the planned route—which, though I'd admittedly borrowed freely from online sources, genuinely did involve

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original thinking from me—but also because when we were down in the canyon itself, the phone signal would be weak at best, nonexistent most of the time. And no data coverage at all, thankfully, which meant Ken couldn't make me do one of the excruciating “live” updates that I was confident were watched by three people and a cat.

Half an hour of desert later, the road abruptly came to an end and Ken parked in a cleared area that evidently passed as a lot. Pierre jumped out of the SUV first, camera on shoulder. Molly followed with the boom mike. I shoved my hands through my hair, waited until Molly nodded, and opened my door.

I stepped down and took a slow look around, then started walking across the scrubby plain in the direction of the canyon, doing my best to appear thoughtful and committed, picking my intrepid way through gnarled clumps of low juniper, pinyon, and cottonwood trees. Pierre and Molly kept tracking while I got closer to the canyon—Ken holding Feather and Gemma back out of shot.

When the canyon revealed itself properly I found myself slowing down, losing awareness of my job in front of the camera, genuinely taken aback by what I was seeing.

It doesn't matter how many times you're told that nothing will prepare you for your first look at the Grand Canyon; the fact is nothing will prepare you for your first look at the Grand Canyon. It takes all the superlatives you've encountered before—words like “vast,” “inconceivable,” and “mind-blowing,” and drains all the color from them.

It seems to stretch forever. The riot of reds and oranges and ochres in the rock walls is almost beyond credibility. The drop to the river defies comprehension, too, like an optical illusion, or something discovered on a distant planet where they built everything on a more expansive scale, under the direction of gods with a bigger budget.

I reached for an appropriate response, something stirring enough to capture the emotional resonance of the moment. I walked to the edge, stared out across the landscape, and—after a long, pregnant pause—said: “Huh.”

“Christ,” Ken muttered. He waved to Pierre to stop filming. “Moll, let’s feed Nolan a lot more coffee and a cigarette . . . and then we’ll try that again, shall we?”

The second take was fine. Centered by doses of my two key food groups, I stood in silence for a moment and then started to talk, gazing out at the astonishing landscape beyond.

“They say nothing prepares you for your first glimpse of the Grand Canyon,” I said with a wry smile. “And it’s true. Mankind may build towers to the sky and circuits too small for the naked eye, but only Mother Nature has the ability to truly take your breath away. I’ll give you a moment to let her do that.”

I stepped to the side. Pierre had the sense to stay on the view for a few seconds and then pan slowly to my new position, by which time I was facing him in to-camera presenter mode.

“I’m sure you’ll agree it’s not surprising so many stories have grown up around this extraordinary place,” I went on. “When mankind is faced with something wondrous, we have a tendency to reach for the stars—for the *gods*. As we embark upon our expedition, it’s important to guard against that. We have plenty of secrets of our own, and we’re going to look for one of them now. Come along with us . . . and let’s see what we find.”

I left a beat, then turned and walked along the rim of the canyon with the blithe and confident air of someone who had the faintest idea of where he was going.

“It’ll do,” Ken said. “Log it, Pierre. And now let’s go look at this trail.”

Having been born and bred in California I could hardly have avoided hiking. But though I am a native there and to the manner grudgingly reconciled, I’ve always favored hiking in the sense of a “nontaxing wander through some pretty woods.” It was quickly obvious that getting down to the river from the rim of the canyon would involve hiking of a wholly different stripe.

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I'd told Molly where I thought we needed to get to, down at the river thousands of feet below, and she'd sorted out the rest—establishing that there were a couple of little-used descent trails from this area. The one we were intending to use was technically on the Navajo reservation, and so we kinda weren't supposed to be here without permission.

“Seriously?”

A narrow and uneven trail clung to the edge of the crumbly, rocky cliff face, winding back and forth through striated fissures in the rock—looking down into a vast open space into which a sizable town could be dropped without touching the sides.

Ken whistled. “Now would be a bad time to reveal you get vertigo, mate.”

“I'm more worried about Pierre having to do it with the camera.”

Pierre jumped off the rim and landed neatly six feet down the “path.” He trotted along it, then back, casting an annoyingly professional eye at the route farther down. “It's fine,” he said. “I go trail-running on worse than this.”

“Of course you do,” I muttered.

Ken smirked. “Okay, camera boy, get yourself in position twenty yards down and we'll do a walk-to-you. Molly, mike Nolan up. Nolan, walk toward us and say something very interesting. And try not to fall off.”

“What should I do?” Feather asked.

“To be honest, love, what I mainly need from you and Gemma right now is to stay out of my way. So hold the fort up here until someone shouts up that we've got the shot done. If any Red Indian braves show up, tell them we're with the government.”

“Really?”

“No,” he said. “*Obviously* don't do that. Just . . . look, just stand there, okay? Both of you. And keep quiet.”

Pierre and Ken headed down the trail. I waited until they were in position, while Molly threaded the lapel mike into my billowy offwhite shirt and dropped the transmitter in the back pocket of my jeans. Then



she picked her way down the path toward Pierre and Ken, looking sure-footed and confident despite the awkward boom mike. I suspect her family hikes don't all start at Starbucks and end in a bar.

When they were all together, Ken raised his hand.

I stepped down onto the start of the trail, gazing out across the eerie multicolored moonscape. Then I started walking, looking at the camera and trying not to think about the enormous drop only a couple of feet to my right.

"A long time ago," I said, "there was a soldier, geologist, and explorer by the name of John Wesley Powell. He led the first passage through the Grand Canyon by Europeans, and went on to direct the Smithsonian's ethnology department. His influence on the study of America's prehistory is far-reaching, admittedly not always in positive ways. But whatever his bias, he's responsible for recording a few of the Native American legends about the canyon."

I indicated the gorge. "There's a Hualapai legend which said all this was created after a great flood, when one of their heroes, Pack-i-tha-a-wi—and no, I'm not sure that's how you pronounce it—stuck a great knife into the land, and moved it back and forth until the canyon was formed, allowing the waters to flow back out to the Sea of the Sunset."

By now I was within a few yards of Pierre and the others. Ken motioned at me to keep going, however, and Pierre continued to film, walking steadily backward.

"Another legend claimed the canyon was created to solace the grief of a great chief, after his wife died. The god Ta-vwoats created a trail to a beautiful land—heaven, in effect—and the chief visited his wife there. Ta-vwoats made him promise never to tell of what he'd seen, in case people wearied of the tribulations of life and tried to get there early. The chief agreed, and Ta-vwoats caused water to flow over the trail, barring access to the other land forever. This is a sacred place. Powell said he'd been warned by local tribes not to enter the Grand Canyon, that it was disobedience to the gods and could bring down their wrath. It didn't stop him. And it's not going to stop us—though

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we'll be visiting with due respect to the local tribes and their beliefs, of course."

I was pretty much done now, but Ken and the others kept moving away from me down the path.

"So," I said, with enough emphasis to communicate that if they didn't stop backing away soon I was simply going to stop talking, "two different perspectives—and the advantage freethinking researchers have is that we *listen*. We also consider things like the fact that within the canyon are massive rock formations with names like the Tower of Set, the Tower of Ra, and the Isis Temple. The official story is the early explorers simply happened to like Egyptian-sounding names, which were fashionable at the time—and maybe that's true. But let's keep an open mind. And now I'm going to stop talking, and concentrate on getting down to the river in one piece."

"And . . . cut," Ken said. "Bit esoteric for the clickbait crowd, but history dorks will love it. Good work, everyone. Except you, Nolan. You were shit."

"Thanks."

"You're welcome. Okay, slackers, let's head back to the car and gather up our crap. It's time to boldly go."

Uncover more about *The  
Anomaly* at  
**[theanomalyfile.blogspot.com](http://theanomalyfile.blogspot.com)**

