

The Explorer

By Michele Dutcher

Among the Hopi Indians the tradition is told that their ancestors once lived in an underworld in the Grand Canyon till dissension arose between the good and the bad, the people of one heart and the people of two hearts. Machetto, who was their chief, counseled them to leave the underworld. They tarried by the Red River, which is the Colorado, and grew grain and corn.

“You might as well come out Kinkaid – I heard you coming up the canyon in your wooden boat.”

G.E. Kinkaid stepped into the small camp that Stanley Thoth had set up on the banks of the Red River. He stood 5'7", black hair tightly pulled back into a braid, with a full, white beard. “Those damn ears of yours will get you in trouble someday.”

“I doubt it, Wally,” he answered, stirring the campfire in front of him. “I've been allowing you to follow me for three days. There's only one way to go around here – downstream. I figured I'd rather that you found me than the other way around.”

Kinkaid put his backpack down, got out a metal cup and helped himself to some coffee from the pot in the coals. “I guess the guys at the Smithsonian heard about my find.”

“Hard not to hear, Kinkaid, when it shows up on the front page of the Arizona Gazette.”

“I'm surprised any of those stuffed shirts can see beyond their teacups and inkwells, Stanley.”

“You should know – having worked for the Institute for thirty years. We were afraid you'd get all these miners whipped into a frenzy with the talk of golden statues and hieroglyphics. So I volunteered to find you and have a look-see for myself.”

“That article was from three months ago.”

“I know.” Stanley reached into his back pocket, taking out a faded shred of newspaper and began to read. “Arizona Gazette, Monday Evening, April 5, 1909. Explorations in Grand Canyon. Mysteries of immense rich cavern being brought to light. Jordan is Enthused.” Stanley folded the paper before returning it to his pocket. “What happened to Jordan, by the way?”

The harsh man in the flannel shirt and weathered jacket gave a lop-sided grin. “I decided I didn't need a chaperone this time out. This discovery is mine, and mine alone.”

Stanley's gun was already drawn and pointed at Kinkaid. “I'm sure you won't mind if I tag along.”

Kinkaid got to his feet, tossing the last of his coffee into the campfire. "It's almost morning. The cave's not far."

Stanley nodded. "I figure it's by where the river branches, on the north side – in spite of what you said in the Gazette."

"You're right again. We don't want other people getting there first, do we?"

The sunlight along the top of the Grand Canyon was almost blinding as it bounced along the orange and beige ridges. They had experienced no complications climbing the cliff walls, both men being in excellent physical condition. The capstone of the mountain called 'Isis Temple' glowed brightly with the new day, while the bottom third of the canyon was still in darkness.

"The steps are just over here," said Kinkaid while pulling his floppy leather hat tightly down over his eyes. He began to lead Stanley to the right.

"I beg to differ," answered the blonde-haired man, nodding to the trail on the left.

"You're right, friend. I get confused so easily."

The ledge was reached quickly, with Kinkaid lighting a lantern he had left by the entrance.

Kinkaid was leading the way in a hurry now, pointing out interesting attractions as they raced past them. Mummies; more writing; a golden statue in a small recess in the cave wall. The cavern system was easily passable, tunnels spiking out like hubs on a wheel. They had been walking for five minutes when they burst into a domed room as large as a warehouse. There were treasures stacked from floor to ceiling.

Stanley walked over to a pile and picked up a crystal globe which began to glow, shimmering at first, then rising, brightening to full day-glow. He grabbed Kinkaid suddenly as Stanley's face began to change into something other than human.

"I need a being with only one heart to help me open the portal," he said, leading Kinkaid to a doorway. "Place your hand there." Wally refused so Stanley grabbed his arm, forcing his left hand into a recess in the cave wall, while Stanley put his right hand on the other side. The doorway began to glow, changing into a portal.

"I could say it's a shame you had to find my hoard, but I never liked you anyway. You were always so busy and curious and dusty."

"I-I-I don't understand," garbled the explorer.

"What do all of these cultures represented here have in common, Kinkaid? One being – that's what. At the start of all of them, there was one man who brought them the gifts of astronomy, architecture, science and mathematics. Thoth, Imhotep, Quetzalcoatl, the Bird Man of Easter Island - I am all of these, bringing knowledge from my star-world. I like this little planet of yours, so I'm staying. But, Wally, I can't afford to have a twerp like you ruining it for me by

blabbing your big fat mouth.” The portal was glowing red as Thoth threw the explorer through the doorway and into a totally new world. “Enjoy your explorations,” he sang after him.

As the light faded, Thoth completely transfigured himself into a winged sphinx with his head almost human and the body of a lion. He sat upon a golden bench, emptying a food pouch taken from a chest in the corner. “Well, if nothing else - it's nice to be home,” he smiled, settling in.

The End