

## Prologue

Easter Island  
July 2019

In the shadow of the giant Moai statues of Rapa Nui, a team of archaeologists from UCLA had developed what they called the Easter Island Project to study and better preserve the artefacts found there. Through this work, the team had excavated several of the heads to reveal the underlying torso and body, suggesting that the inhabitants of this mysterious place were more advanced than was once thought.

The team's work was groundbreaking, but it didn't end there. A native boy in his teens told them he had seen a Moai deep inside a little-known cave, near Ana Te Pahu.

With this information at hand, a team of five experts including the director of the Easter Island Project herself, Joanne Turner, an adventurer at heart, went on a deep cave expedition to find this unknown wonder.

In a downward trek armed with a flashlight and a

Nikon DSLR strapped around her neck, Joanne and her team followed the guide into the darkness of the cavern.

And to her surprise, the boy was right.

A large grayish Moai buried from the waist down made from basalt rock, formed through the cooling and solidification of magma, loomed out of the ground with its massive eyebrow ridge, elongated ears, and oval nostrils. The face was, unusually, surrounded by dark soil, and a stairway of stone pillars, cut in the shape of tree trunks, led up to face the ancient monolith. When she first saw the Moai statue, Joanne felt a frisson of excitement and had an almost uncontrollable urge to climb the stone pillars.

She approached the enormous square opening that framed the grotto situated high up on the cliff top, flooding the cave with natural light. The fall from the lip of the cave dropped away some one hundred and twenty feet. It overlooked the Pacific Ocean and a U-shaped rock formation, giving the site a majestic and out-of-this-world ambience.

‘Let’s get to work, people,’ Joanne said with a clap of her hands, then started to take photos with her digital camera.

Like a well-oiled machine, the team set about doing their jobs. Spotlights fluttered inside the already lit cavern. Buckets, trowels, brushes, and foldable shovels were extracted from backpacks.

‘Dig around the black soil; let’s see how far down it goes,’ Joanne ordered, circling the face with wonderment. ‘Why the hell is this thing here?’ she murmured to herself.

## LAST SECRET KEYSTONE

Carefully, the two Polynesian men hired to do the heavy lifting began to remove the soil surrounding the square head.

A putrid odor suddenly engulfed the site.

‘What is that?’ queried Joanne, pinching her nose against the overpowering smell.

Ten minutes later they had all begun to feel ill, and were overcome with bouts of coughing. Then the coughing intensified, quickly turning into vomiting. The two Polynesian workmen stopped digging, kneeled before the structure and begged for mercy.

‘We should not be here, boss,’ one said to Joanne. ‘I’m afraid we have interfered with the gods.’

Joanne was puzzled. She covered her nose and mouth with her dirty white T-shirt as sweat began to trickle down her cheeks. She coughed into her sleeve, rubbed her watery eyes, and decided, having come this far, that she would step up the tree-trunk stones.

The workmen begged for her to retreat, but she didn’t listen.

‘This statue is here for a reason,’ she argued, carefully continuing up the stairway that encircled the face. She stopped at the square shaped elongated ear. ‘What have we here,’ she breathed, trying not to inhale too deeply to avoid the insidious smell, as she began to study the unusual shape before her.

‘What is it?’ asked her research assistant, wiping a shaky hand across his mouth.

Joanne frowned. ‘It’s a drawing,’ she said, flabbergasted. ‘One I’ve never seen before.’

On previous digs, she had found etched petroglyphs

## PHIL PHILIPS

on the backs of the colossal figures, commonly crescent-shaped to represent Polynesian canoes.

This was different.

It seemed more advanced than anything she'd ever seen before.

And it was deeply indented and here for a purpose, she was sure.

Joanne ran her finger along the grooves and snapped away with her DSLR. Then, seeing that the condition of her team was worsening, she decided to head back to her campsite so she could analyze her findings and return at a later time. She knew she had uncovered something incredible here; something that needed to be thoroughly researched and studied.

Two days later, all five team members, including Joanne, choked to death in the most brutal of ways. The cave was immediately quarantined and closed to the public, and warning signs erected until a detailed investigation could be conducted. Following careful analysis, the medical team established that the cause of all five deaths was toxicity due to inhalation of extremely high levels of arsenic found within the cave's disturbed soil. The local people dubbed it the curse of the ancestors.