THE THRILLING *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLER

# THE EMERALD MILE

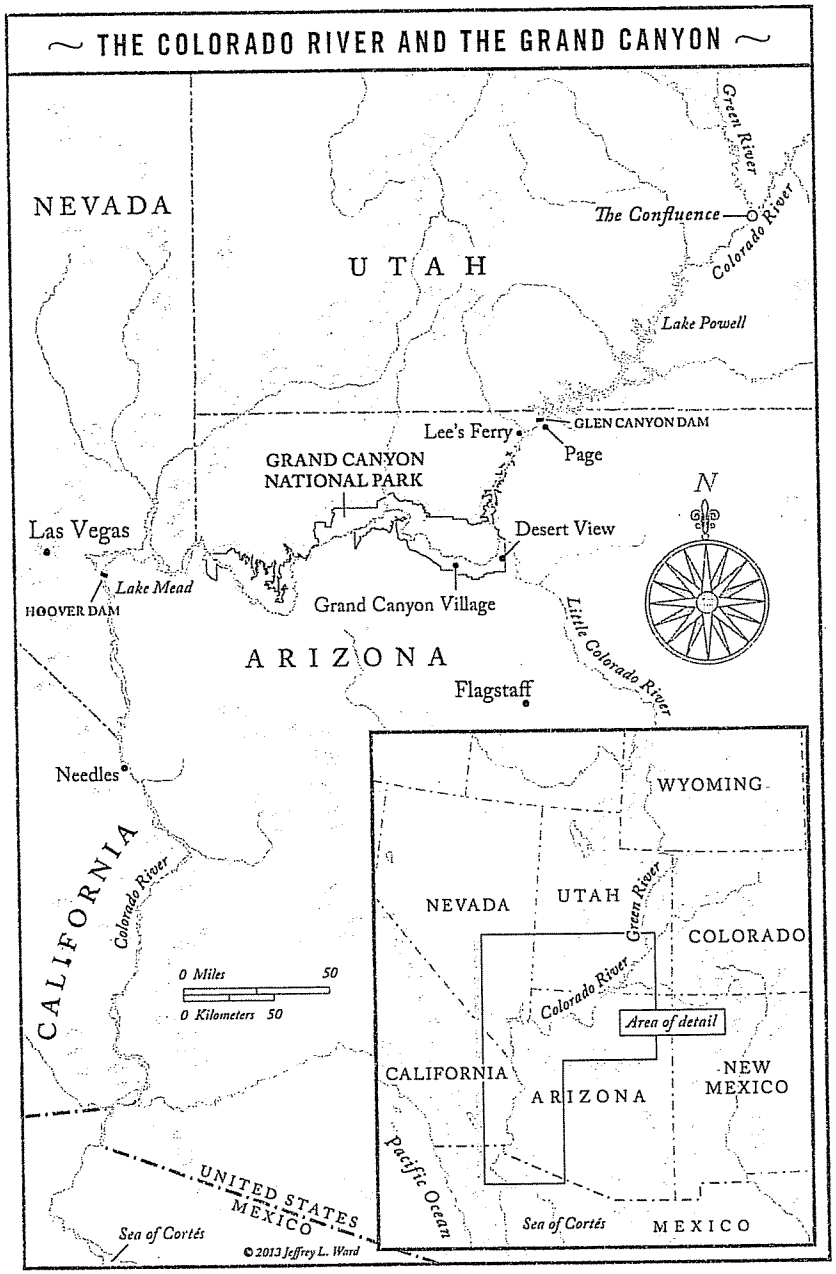
## THE EPIC STORY OF THE FASTEST RIDE IN HISTORY THROUGH THE HEART OF THE GRAND CANYON

WINNER NATIONAL OUTDOOR BOOK AWARD NOBA

KEVIN FEDARKO

"*The Emerald Mile* deserves a spot on the bookshelf alongside such classics as *Cadillac Desert*, *Desert Solitaire*, and *Encounters with the Archdruid*. It's that good."

—*THE DURANGO TELEGRAPH*




# LAUNCH

## June 25, 1983

On any given evening in summer, but most notably in late June, there comes a moment just after the sun has disappeared behind the rimrock, and just before the darkness has tumbled down the walls, when the bottom of the Grand Canyon gives itself over to a moment of muted grace that feels something like an act of atonement for the sins of the world. This is the fleeting interregnum between the blast-furnace heat of the day and the star-draped immensity of the night, and when it arrives, the bedrock bathes in a special kind of light, the pink-and-orange blush of a freshly opened nectarine. This is also the canyon's loveliest hour, when there is nothing sweeter, nothing more calming to the soul, than standing along the shallows at the edge of the Colorado River and breathing in the wonder of that place. The ramparts rising nakedly for more than a vertical mile above. The locomotive-size slabs that have peeled away from the terraced cliffs and shattered to pieces far below. And most bewitching of all, the muscular, sluicing, glimmer-gilded surface of the great river itself.

But June 25, 1983, was not any given evening. Not by a long shot. And with twilight now fading, the face of the water turned menacing and unknowable as the biggest flood in a generation throttled downstream into the night.

An hour or so later, the moon appeared, ascending with stately deliberation until it was suspended in all its fullness inside the thin ribbon of sky between the rims. There it hung, fat and heavy, casting the upper faces of the cliffs in a silver and faintly malignant glaze.

Deep within the canyon's corridor, the defile between the escarpments was too narrow to accept most of this illumination, and so the bottommost bands of rock, the ancient strata of Zoroaster granite and Vishnu schist that lined the edge of the river, were lost in shadow. But far upstream at a place called Lee's Ferry, where a breach in the cliffs marks the spot where all river journeys through the canyon begin, the walls widened and the river was able to open itself to the sky. Here, the moonbeams streamed down the hunched shoulders of Shinarump shale and spilled across the water, etching each wave, every ripple and eddy, in a spectral radiance.

Out there in the millrace, the rush of water was broad and powerful, and as the current pushed past, it did so with an eerie silence. But if you cocked your body at just the right angle, you could detect a faint thrum, a kind of basal tremor. The frequency of that vibration was impossible for the ear to pick up, but it registered unmistakably on the hairs of the forearms, the wall of the chest, and deep in the belly. This was the muffled resonance of a runaway river, the sub-audible bell-tone of water surging with ungovernable force into the throat of the canyon.

Just beyond the riverbank, a road led away from the water, snaking off in the distance toward Highway 89, the only thruway in this remote outpost of northern Arizona. The surface of that road was strewn with loose gravel, and about an hour before midnight, it crunched softly with the approach of a vehicle whose driver was proceeding guardedly.

Behind the headlights loomed the boxy silhouette of a small delivery truck, a contraption whose appearance, in this place and at this hour, was perplexing because it seemed to herald the sort of business that never unfolds at the ferry—an after-hours FedEx pickup, perhaps, or the arrival of a stack of tomorrow's newspapers. The mystery was resolved only after the driver wheeled across the parking lot at the edge of the water and it became clear that the truck was towing a metal trailer. Cradled on the bed of that trailer was a small wooden dory.

The boat's profile was distinctive—an upturned prow that terminated in a sharp point, and a hull whose bottom was curved like the blade of a scimitar. Lashed to her decks were two sets of ten-foot oars hewn from straight-grained Pennsylvania ash, and tucked into the footwell at the center of the boat lay a cable connecting a car battery to a pair of powerful searchlamps, the kind of devices that jacklighters use when hunting deer in the dark. There was just enough light



to make out her colors—a beryl-green hull and bright red gunwales. And if you looked closely, you could discern the black-and-gold lettering emblazoned along the right side of her bow that spelled her name: *Emerald Mile.*

~

As the truck completed the arc of its turn, three figures leaped out and began racing toward the river while the driver, who had now cast off all signs of hesitation, backed the trailer smartly alongside a line of rubber rafts that were moored at the shore.

On the decks of those rafts lay a squadron of half a dozen slumbering river guides, who had arrived at the ferry's boat ramp several hours earlier, only to be told by the National Park Service ranger that the Colorado was closed due to the flood. As the guides awoke to this burst of activity, they scratched their heads in confusion. Then, intuiting what was about to unfold, they roused themselves from their sleeping bags and hustled over to lend a hand by loosening the straps that anchored the dory to the trailer and heaving her into the water.

She hit with a sharp slap and shot almost a quarter of the way across the eddy before coming to a stop, bobbing gently like a champagne cork. Meanwhile, the mysterious trio splashed through the shallows and hauled themselves on board.

The first of those figures presented an image that seemed to cut in two directions at once. In some ways, his appearance perfectly embodied the demeanor of the unbound river. His hair was wild and out of control, while his limbs moved with a fluid grace as he scrambled across the decking and positioned himself at the oar station in the center of the boat. But in other respects, he appeared to have no connection at all with the water he was about to ride. His breathing was even and measured, and the expression on his face was composed as he threaded the oars into their locks, curled his fingers around the handles, and waited calmly for his two companions to stow the spotlights and the battery, then settle themselves into their seats in the bow and the stern.

When everything was ready, all three men turned toward the shore, where their driver was now staring at his wristwatch while completing a silent countdown.

When the second hand on his watch reached exactly 11:00 p.m., the driver cried, "*Go!*"—and with a sharp intake of breath, the wild-haired boatman thrust his torso forward with his arms outstretched, a move that sent the shafts of his oars planing sternward. At the top of this stroke, he snapped both wrists at the same time, a maneuver that squared up the oar blades just as they entered the water. Then he pulled back with his entire body while driving the balls of his feet directly into the front end of the footwell.

His first stroke sent them skimming across the eddy, and the second speared them into the main current. There, the boatman paused for a half second to permit the stern to swing downstream. As the dory completed this clockwise turn, the river seized the hull and hurled them toward the swiftly rising walls of rock that marked the gateway to the Grand Canyon.

And just like that, they were gone.

~

Well, almost gone.

In the final moments before the boat vanished, another vehicle pulled into the parking lot at the ferry and a second set of headlights swept the edge of the river. Inside that vehicle sat a family that had driven all the way from New Mexico in the hope of embarking on a rafting vacation, only to learn from the ranger that all launches were forbidden—disappointing news, given the hassles they had gone through to secure a highly coveted noncommercial permit to run the canyon. After motoring back to Highway 89 for a late supper at a roadside diner, they were now returning to their tent and arrived just in time to catch sight of the mysterious boat as she cast off and disappeared—an incident that they planned on reporting to the ranger first thing in the morning. In the meantime, they were left to ponder what had just taken place.

What in the world were those clowns up to, they wondered, launching into the teeth of a flood on the near side of midnight with the assistance of a gaggle of guides who knew perfectly well that the Colorado was closed? Were they out of their minds?

In a way, yes, they truly were—although the men aboard that boat were also engaged in an urgent mission. A gesture of poetry and defiance quite unlike anything the canyon had ever seen. A quest that was inspired and driven by the obsessions of the fanatical boatman who was now gunning his dory toward the maelstrom that awaited them downstream.

Kenton Grua was a veteran of the river world as well as one of its most vivid and eccentric characters, a dreamer whose passions for the canyon ran deeper than almost anyone else's, and whose prowess as a dory captain was unmatched by all but a handful of boatmen. The voyage upon which he and his companions had just embarked, however, would call upon all of his skills and more.

Between Lee's Ferry and the Grand Wash Cliffs, the sandstone portals at the edge of the Mojave Desert that marked the western terminus of the canyon, lay almost three hundred miles of river, the worst of which were studded with the most storied white water in all of North America. Threading that gauntlet in a rowboat was an odyssey that typically lasted at least two weeks and could take as long as twenty-three days. Yet Grua's illegal pre-midnight launch on the crest of this flood tide was designed to smash that timetable to pieces.



If he and his accomplices could steer through the darkness and keep their bow square to the biggest waves; if they could somehow avoid capsizing or drowning or being broken apart on the rocks; if they could stay awake and maintain their pace by spelling each other at the oars while dodging the platoon of irate rangers who would soon be alerted to their unauthorized presence on the river—if they could carry out all of those tasks without a single hitch, it was possible that the swollen Colorado might serve as a kind of hydraulic slingshot that would pitch them all the way from the ferry to the cliffs so swiftly that the duration of the trip would be calibrated not in weeks, or even days, but in *hours*.

At which point, if everything unfolded according to plan, the little green dory with the bright red gunwales would be catapulted into legend as the fastest boat ever propelled—by oar, by motor, or by the grace of God—through the heart of the Grand Canyon.

# LEVIATHAN

ROUGHLY thirty thousand yards upstream from the *Emerald Mile*'s point of launch on the evening of June 25, a distance of some fifteen miles, a rampart ascended into the night that bore no resemblance to the canyon and whose surface was burnished by a radiance that had no connection to the moon. Instead of running naturally along the edges of the Colorado, this wall stood directly athwart the river's current, thrusting more than seven hundred feet into the air from its foundation in the bedrock deep beneath the surface. The shape of that wall was a complex parabolic arch whose camber and curves had no organic analogue, and its texture was equally synthetic. Unlike the corridors of the canyon, whose facades are broken by the endlessly striating cracks and blemishes of living rock, the face of this barricade was smooth and flawless.

Something blunt and clean and undeniably impressive resided in the alabaster perfection of all that concrete. Nearly ten million tons of the stuff had been slung across the breadth of the river by an army of engineers and laborers who had started assembling its frame in 1960, pouring and shaping with such care and precision that, three years later, when they were finally through, it looked as if a highly skilled machinist had tooled the edges of a giant clamshell and dropped it neatly between the embrasure of stone. Aesthetics aside, however,

the overwhelming impression that this monolith left on the mind, the element that overwhelmed the senses and blocked out everything else, was its sheer size.

The wall was more than twice the height of the Statue of Liberty and its length exceeded that of the *Seawise Giant*, the longest supertanker ever built. The dimensions were so implausible that, upon seeing this colossus for the first time, one was tempted to conclude that it could have been conceived only under conditions where the normal laws of gravity and physics did not apply. And this notion, that perhaps the structure did not belong fully to this world, was buttressed by an odd event now unfolding across its face.

At 11:00 p.m. on one of the hottest nights of the year, the entire wall appeared to have been overtaken by a snowstorm. Only when the eyes had adjusted to the scale did this agitated cloud reveal itself as a nation of disoriented moths, tens of thousands of them fluttering like confetti around a line of sodium-vapor floodlights, each of which was sending a pilaster of blue-tinted light upward, like the columns on a Greek temple, toward the parapet of the Glen Canyon Dam.

~

Those arc lights were mounted along the flat roof of a windowless structure that was anchored at the very bottom of the dam, a building whose profile boasted none of the grace and symmetry of the great white wall behind it. Nine stories high and shaped like an enormous shoe box kicked onto its side, Glen's hydroelectric power plant was devoid of a single curve or bend that might have enabled it to harmonize with the face of the dam.

Located on the far west side of the plant, eight stories above the surface of the river, was a chamber roughly thirty feet wide and fifty feet deep known as the Control Room. Staffed by a team of ten technicians who worked on three eight-hour shifts that rotated at 8:00 a.m., 4:00 p.m., and midnight, the room housed as many as five employees during the day. At night, however, there were usually no more than two: an assistant who roved around to inspect the many gauges and valves within the power plant as well as the extensive network of tunnels that ran through the interior of the dam itself; and an operator required to stay put behind a large steel desk equipped with three telephones and a two-way radio.

The US Bureau of Reclamation, the arm of the federal government that had built the dam and was responsible for its operation, has long been particular about disclosing the names of its Control Room personnel, a security precaution that applies to all National Critical Infrastructure facilities deemed vulnerable to attack. Accordingly, the bureau has redacted from its logbooks the employee who was on duty on the night of June 25, and so we do not know his name. But the manager in charge of the Control Room during this period



was Dick White. And according to White, if the normal pattern of behavior was being observed for the graveyard shift, his operator was sitting in a government-issued chair designed for air-traffic controllers, with his ankles crossed and his feet propped on the surface of the steel desk.

From this vantage, White's man was positioned at Glen's nerve center and serving as the cerebral cortex for the entire facility. Arranged before him was a bank of panels studded with so many lights and switches and dials that it looked as if he were monitoring the public transit system of a large city. Thanks to that instrumentation, he had his finger on the pulse of not just the dam itself but also the power plant and the transmission lines snaking out of the canyon. Every aspect of the chamber in which he sat—its cool colors, its neat lines, the unwinking vigilance of the lights and the protective symmetry of the encircling walls—upheld the principle of control: the affirmation that here in this place, at this hour, human beings were indisputably in charge of a renegade river that had once been the scourge of the Southwest.

For each member of the Control Room team, the gadgetry on those panels was as familiar as the knobs on his stereo at home. But according to White, every time you sat down at that desk, it was impossible not to feel a flitter of exhilaration and unease that flowed from the awareness of being in the driver's seat of one of the largest machines on earth. A piece of technology so enormous that it made other things that are often invoked as reference points for jumbo-size industrial design—the bridge of an aircraft carrier, the cockpit of a C-130 cargo jet, the command module of an Apollo rocket—seem puny by comparison.

But another factor was at work there too. Because, in addition to the dam's size, you also understood that out there in the darkness on the opposite side of that wall loomed one of the longest reservoirs on the planet, a body of water that extended 186 miles up the ancient bed of the Colorado and touched 1,960 miles of shore—longer than the Pacific coastline from Seattle to San Diego—and whose ponderous volume, somewhere in excess of nine billion gallons, was incessantly pressing against the upstream flanks of the dam.

That was an awful lot of water to be holding back. Water whose insistence on moving downhill harbored more power than one could imagine. As White well knew, the fury that water was capable of unleashing could be profoundly unsettling, especially if you dwelled on the idea too deeply.

But this was also what made the dam truly awesome.

~

There was no such thing as twilight inside the Control Room of the Glen Canyon Dam—no velvet hour when the floor and the walls were bathed in a

peach-colored glow and the operator was able to heave a sigh of tranquillity. But on any given evening, whether it was the height of the summer solstice or the dead of winter, there was something almost as gratifying, perhaps even more so. Because whoever was sitting at the desk in front of the control panels at that moment got to play God.

The ritual usually kicked off just before 6:00 p.m., when a call arrived from the Western Area Power Administration dispatcher, a man sitting 350 miles to the northeast in Montrose, Colorado. This signaled the start of the evening surge, the moment when most of the twenty million people in an area stretching from eastern New Mexico to Southern California were preparing to return home from work, turn on their lights, preheat their ovens, and sit down to watch the evening news. The dispatcher in Montrose was responsible for ensuring that the load on the power grid would meet this spiking demand, and he anticipated the evening rush by ordering White's man to start calling up electricity.

The operator responded by pushing a black button that activated a high-pressure lube pump that shot high-viscosity oil into the thrust bearings inside one of the dam's eight generators. If you were standing on the floor of the power plant, this would register as a low whine. Five seconds later, the wicket gates would open at the base of one of Glen's penstocks—giant steel tubes that ran through the wall of the dam and whose intakes were positioned more than three hundred feet above the power plant on the reservoir side of the wall. At this point, the sound of the pump motor would give way to a roar of water.

The drop was enormous, and at the base of the dam, the column of water inside was bent into a horizontal stream, channeled into the power plant, and blasted against a set of runner blades attached to one of the plant's 155,500-horsepower turbines. The rush rose another notch as the blades threw torque into the battle-tank-size turbine, which spun faster and faster until it was whirling at two and a half revolutions per second.

Extending vertically from the top of the turbine was a shaft connected to a generator that housed a two-thousand-ton rotor whose perimeter was lined with forty-eight steel poles that functioned as electromagnets. When the rotor was fully engaged, this spinning steel forest created a magnetic flux sufficient to generate 125,000 kilowatts, enough electricity to power roughly one hundred thousand homes and businesses.

The current coursed from the top of the generator to a bank of transformers, which punched the electricity into a set of nine transmission cables that ran up to the switching yard on the rim. From there, the lines marched off across the desert toward the cities of the Southwest—to Phoenix and Tucson and dozens of smaller towns scattered around the Four Corners region, where, hundreds of



miles away, the energy that had been locked inside the river was now released to civilization: zapping frozen microwave dinners, broadcasting Peter Jennings's image on the television, lighting up the forty-foot-tall neon cowboy sign on Fremont Street in Las Vegas.

Nothing about any of this was secret or unusual. Indeed, the process was so routine that most people had little appreciation that, perhaps more than anything else, this was the generative spark that separated the modern world from the Dark Ages. But for the man at the steel desk, there was nothing casual about cranking that dynamo into motion, hearing the roar, and watching the gauges and dials registering the amperage as the current shot from the bottom of the gorge and sped off to those distant cities and towns. Inside Glen's penstocks and turbines and generators, the river was literally being reborn as something else—water quickening into electricity. The performance had a kind of magic, and for every member of the Control Room team, the charge was to be savored.

Except that, on this particular night, the charge had been replaced by something else—an echo of the same chaos that was about to descend on Kenton Grua and his crew deep inside the Grand Canyon. Because on June 25, White and his colleagues were twenty-three days into a crisis that had no precedent in the history of hydroelectric dams. And by now, every single one of those men had forgotten what normal was.

~

The emergency they were confronting had been set in motion almost a year earlier and some eight thousand miles to the west of the Arizona desert, on the far edge of the Pacific Ocean. There, in October of the previous year, a massive El Niño event had triggered a series of barometric anomalies that had given birth to the largest spring runoff within the Colorado River basin in twenty-five years. The last time anyone had witnessed a runoff of comparable size, the dam had not even been built yet—which helped to explain why the network of agencies responsible for controlling the largest river in the Southwest had been caught flat-footed.

The details of how things had gone off the rails were still obscure, and the full picture of what had taken place would not emerge for months. But the upshot was that by early June, Glen was already holding back the runoff from 108,000 square miles, a region the size of Poland, and every additional acre-foot of floodwater that poured into the upper end of Lake Powell, the reservoir behind the dam, was arriving faster than it could be drained through the dam.

Fortunately, Glen was equipped with an emergency bypass designed for just such an event. On each side of the dam, a massive spillway tunnel had been bored through 675 feet of Navajo sandstone and lined with thirty-six inches of

concrete. In theory, those twin monsters were capable of inhaling a combined flow of more than 200,000 cfs,* neatly channeling that water around the dam before dumping it back into the river. This should have been enough to absorb whatever the Colorado might care to throw at Glen. There was just one hitch. The tunnels had never been put through a full-on test drive, and in early June, something had gone terribly wrong.

Deep inside the spillways, a series of vicious shock waves had scoured away the concrete lining and exposed the soft sandstone walls to the full force of the river. As a result, water arcing out the mouths of both tunnels was laden with debris that included chunks of concrete, pieces of rebar, and boulders the size of refrigerators. In effect, the Colorado had begun to dismantle the spillways by tearing their guts to pieces.

Throughout the month of June, the goal of every person who worked at the dam was to funnel as much of the water in the reservoir as possible downstream into the canyon. To that end, they had been running the power plant nonstop for weeks, maxing out the turbines and the generators and dumping the extra electricity onto the grid at bargain rates. They were also redlining the river outlets, a set of four steel tubes running through the eastern portion of the dam, which bypassed the power plant and blasted water directly into the Colorado at 120 miles per hour. They were even harnessing the stricken spillways, sending as much water as they dared through the tunnels and keeping their fingers crossed. The scene was spectacular and chilling. You could hear the thunder of the discharge from the parapet, and if you walked out toward the hollow-jet valves on the east side of the power plant, you could actually feel the vibrations through the soles of your shoes.

And yet, none of that was enough.

As the runoff continued racing down from the tops of the southern Rockies, across the Colorado piedmont, through the badlands of Utah and into the upper tentacles of Lake Powell in one vast rush, the surface of the reservoir inched upward with each passing hour. Fifteen feet short of the parapet, the water would overwhelm the steel gates that guarded the spillways, then plummet back into the crippled tunnels and resume its excavation of the sandstone. At the very least, this would inflict dreadful damage on the gates and the tunnels while robbing the engineers of any ability to control the water they were releasing downstream. In effect, they would lose dominion over the river. Yet that was only the *third*-worst-case scenario.

*Floods are measured in cubic feet per second, also known as cfs, a dynamic calibration of both volume and force that is obtained by multiplying the average speed of the current by the river's cross section.



If luck was running against them, the hydraulic blast that had already ravaged the tunnels' interiors might cut laterally through the sandstone walls and create a breach just downstream from the foot of the dam. Even then, the damage could probably be contained, albeit at tremendous cost to the Reclamation's coffers and reputation. The last possibility, however, was nothing short of apocalyptic.

If things truly went to hell, the river could, in theory, establish a connection between the damaged spillways and the bottom of the reservoir behind the dam, triggering an "uncontrolled release." This would send the contents of Lake Powell down the length of the Grand Canyon, across Lake Mead, and over the lip of Hoover Dam. From there, the surge would bulldoze across western Arizona, where it would inundate the towns of Laughlin, Needles, Parker, and Yuma, along with almost every dam and river diversion structure along the lower Colorado. As a final grace note, much of that water would probably wind up taking out the infrastructure to California's Imperial Valley, one of the richest agricultural breadbaskets in the country, before dispersing into the Sea of Cortés.

During the first week of June, the engineers had dismissed the terminal scenario as absurd. But by the end of the month, no one at Reclamation could say with certainty what the river would or would not do. Hence, the Control Room team's primary concerns on the night of June 25 were the serious and far-reaching consequences of what was happening at the dam itself. Although they were aware that the torrent they were sending downstream had jacked the Colorado to a level that hadn't been seen in a quarter century, they had no inkling of the commotion this was causing deep inside the Grand Canyon.

At that very moment, more than two hundred boats and nearly thirteen hundred people who had left from Lee's Ferry prior to the river's closure were scattered up and down the 277-mile corridor within the canyon. The engineers had no idea that several of those boats had been destroyed, or that dozens of people had been dumped into the current, or that helicopters had been sent in to rescue the survivors, some of whom had been washed as far as ten miles downstream in fifty-degree water. And, understandably, the managers of the dam didn't have the faintest clue that an hour before midnight, a trio of boatmen had staged an illegal launch of a little wooden dory out of Lee's Ferry and were now racing straight toward the worst of the carnage.

~

Although the dam operators' myopia was neither malicious nor willful, their ignorance underscored one of the strangest and most confusing aspects of the drama about to unfold. For although the reservoir and the canyon were bound

together by geology, by government oversight, and most important by the thread of the Colorado itself, they were actually two separate worlds. Indeed, Glen's hulking edifice represented one of the starkest divisions on the American landscape, a borderline that seemed to delineate the frontier between two different republics. And to say that the citizens of those rival domains did not always see eye to eye was a bit of an understatement, because each represented the antithesis of the other's deepest values.

To the engineers and the technicians who belonged to the world of the dam, Glen was no dead monolith but, rather, a living and breathing thing, a creature that pulsed with energy and dynamism. Perhaps even more important, the dam was also a triumphant capstone of human ingenuity, the culmination of a civil-engineering lineage that had seen its first florescence in the irrigation canals of ancient Mesopotamia and China, then shot like a bold arrow through the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and the Industrial Revolution to reach its zenith here in the sun-scorched wastelands of the American Southwest. Glen embodied the glittering inspiration and the tenacious drive of the American century—a spirit that in other contexts had been responsible for harnessing the atom and putting men on the moon. As impressive as those other accomplishments may have been, nothing excelled the nobility of transforming one of the harshest deserts on earth into a vibrant garden. In the minds of its engineers and its managers, Glen affirmed everything that was right about America.

To Kenton Grua and the river folk who inhabited the world of the canyon, however, the dam was an offense against nature. Thanks to Glen and a host of similar Reclamation projects along the Colorado, one of the greatest rivers in the West had been reduced to little more than a giant plumbing system, a network of pipes and faucets and catchment tubs whose chief purpose lay in the dubious goal of bringing golf courses to Phoenix, swimming pools to Tucson, and air-conditioned shopping malls to Vegas. A magnificent waterway had been sacrificed on the altar of a technology that enabled people to prosper without limits, without balance, without any connection to the environment in which they lived—and in the process, fostered the delusion that the desert had been conquered. But in the eyes of the river folk, even that wasn't the real cost.

To the boatmen and the guides, the untamed Colorado embodied a current of values that ran far deeper than the celebration of economic progress. Chief among them being the idea that nothing offers a more compelling distillation of nature's beauty than a free-flowing river. In their eyes, Glen was a testament not to everything that was right with America but everything that was wrong with it. And it was here that the illicit adventure upon which the *Emerald Mile* had just embarked raised the possibility of something more provocative than simply setting a speed record.



On its surface, staging a clandestine race through the Grand Canyon was little more than a bold act of mischief. But to conduct such a race atop a runaway flood tide, and to do so at a moment when a hated hydroelectric dam was in peril—those things elevated the endeavor, at least in Grua's mind, to something more than just a stunt. To him, it offered a once-in-a-lifetime chance to participate, in the most visceral way imaginable, with the ancestral majesty of the Colorado. An act that was insane and reckless, to be sure, but that also stood as an expression of defiance against not only the ideals for which the dam stood but the arrogance of having built the thing in the first place.

Had Glen's engineers and technicians known of the speed run, they would have surely felt themselves justified in dismissing this notion as idiotic, thereby reinforcing the extent to which these two dominions, the world of the river and the world of the dam, were so fundamentally opposed. In fact, it was probably fair to say that no one on either side of this divide shared anything at all in common. But on the evening of June 25, members of both camps were inextricably united by at least one truth.

In its own way, each group was confronting the unsettling fact that on this night, at this hour, despite all the engineering and the technology, despite the colossus of the dam itself, the Colorado and the canyon that contained it were as wild, as ungovernable, and as mysterious as on the day they were first discovered.