

ALEX MORGAN

Paranormal Investigator



THE
CLOQUE

JAY MASON

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The Series

Alexandra Morgan, known as Alex, is a young, bright 19 yr old at college student and the daughter of two prize-winning scientists. What no one knows: In her free time Alex is a paranormal investigator who takes on a variety of strange and mysterious cases ... Together with her best friend Rusty and a mysterious stranger called c0nundrum she unravels a conspiracy that will put her own life and that of her family in danger ...

About the Book

Alex is contacted by the mysterious stranger C0numdrum, who hires her to investigate a strange energy he senses from her college. Her research leads her to an old mine tunnel under her school, where she sets something strange in motion ...

The Author

Jay Mason is a pen name of Caroline Dunford, who lives in Scotland in a cottage by the sea with her partner and her two young sons. As all authors are required to have as much life experience as possible she has been, at various times, a drama coach, an archery instructor, a counsellor, a qualified psychotherapist, a charity worker, a journalist, a voice actor, a hypnotherapist, and a playwright. Today she writes mainly novels, the odd (often very odd) short story, theatre plays, the occasional article, teaches and mentors. She can't remember a time when she didn't write or tell stories and seriously doubts that she could remain sane if she stopped doing so.

JAY MASON

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Episode 1



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1. Enemy of my Enemy

“At nineteen I shouldn’t have to lock my bedroom door,” muttered Alex as she threw the bolt. Then she returned to her computer. C0nundrum had left another message. He’d found her through her website, ***Beyond Belief Investigations***, and been pestering her for months.

“I have a project for you if you are interested. Please respond.”

Alex frowned and typed. “Hi c0nundrum, I don’t take on projects. If you read my terms and conditions,” she inserted the link here in case he had missed the bolded URL at the bottom of the page. “You will also see that unless your case is liable to provide me with a unique opportunity I require payment in information. As you have not yet, despite your repeated messages, offered any insight into your case there is little I have to say to you. You should be aware that I am an experienced paranormal investigator and it is highly unlikely, though not impossible, that you will have information I do not already have in my files.” She signed off using one of her favourite false names.

Alex hesitated for a moment. The last line felt a bit immodest, but she had said she didn’t know everything. It was simply that she did get fed-up with people who played all mysterious and enigmatic only to eventually reveal the information they wanted to pay with was something she had discovered years ago.

She pressed send and leaned back in her chair, running her fingers through her long, curly hair. They snagged on a knot, and she spent a few minutes attempting to unpick it. Done, she looked back at the screen, intending to shut the machine down. There hadn’t been any interesting messages

on her website for ages. Just a misguided youth asking her opinion on the number of hit points she felt a succubus should have in the game he was developing.

C0nundrum's reply glowed back at her. Normally he took days to respond.

"I can assure you that 'my case' will be both of interest and informative for you. I am attaching a map of the old mine under your college. I have marked the point where I suggest you enter. As proof of information I can offer, I am also enclosing the chemical formula and instructions for a substance I suggest you take with you. Should events take an 'alarming' turn you may find it of use."

Alex typed quickly. She was beginning to feel really annoyed. "I need more information than this. If you expect me to go grubbing around underground, I need to know what you expect I might find."

There was no response. Her bedroom door handle rattled.

"Dinner, Alex," called her Dad. Alex groaned and turned off the computer.

Alex's mother might be one of the foremost chemists of her generation, but cooking had never been among her skill set. Fortunately, neither of her parents were proof against her mother's barely edible experiments and they both retired to bed shortly after dinner.

Alex waited until she was fairly sure they would be tucked up with their piles of papers to be read by tomorrow — all part of being two of the leading scientists at The Center for Scientific Excellence — and then she snuck back downstairs to her mother's home lab. Of course the door was locked, but Alex's uncle had given her set of lockpicks for Christmas years ago. Uncle Andrew was a great joker, but his jokes were generally in poor taste. Alex had once again been in a lot of trouble, so he'd given her these for

her 'future career'. Neither he nor her parents knew she had kept them all these years nor that she had grown extremely proficient at using them.

Then with an efficiency borne of much practice she began systematically raiding the lab for the ingredients c0nundrum had listed.

The morning at college seemed especially long. The only excitement Alex felt as she flunked one class after another was the awareness of what she was carrying in her backpack. Or rather lack of awareness. She'd followed c0nundrum's instructions to the letter, which would have surprised her chemistry lecturer no end, and created two small yellow disks. The formulae had made little sense to her. She had no real idea of what they would do and she was carrying them around with her. It added a certain frisson to an otherwise dull day. It distracted her enough that she gave four correct answers in the psychics' oral quiz and knew she'd have to be doubly stupid tomorrow.

The lunchtime stampede was Alex's cue to get to work. Alex's lockpicks made short work of the side door she preferred. The cameras here only swept pass every twenty seconds. "Candy from a baby," said Alex, as she slipped in. Still no motion sensors inside. One day they would find the money in the college budget to upgrade the security system and she'd be in trouble, but for now she could slink around the corridors to her heart's delight.

The entry point that c0nundrum had marked on the map was all too easy to find. All Alex had to do was pull up of some loose boards at the back of a storeroom used for cleaning supplies.

"I swear c0nundrum, if this is some kind of set-up," Alex whispered to herself, "I will find you and I will make you pay."

A large silver pipe ran along the side of the passage. There was an old fashioned switch on the wall which activated an antiquated form of emergency lighting. Alex

switched on the small mike clipped to her collar and began to record her observations.

“So far the corridor appears to be an access to utility conduits. I’m guessing heating. Wouldn’t be surprised if I end up in the boiler room. Can’t shake the feeling this is all one big set up.”

She carried on for a while. “Doors on my right and left. Ignoring them for now. Passage still sloping down. Dustier now. I can see a bigger door at the end. Metal and a huge padlock. Let’s hope it’s not rusted.”

Alex crouched down and began to work on the lock. She snapped two of her lockpicks before she got it open. “Remember to charge c0nundrum for expenses,” she muttered into the mike. The door swung open with a loud creak.

“So much for the silent approach,” said Alex. She pulled the door to behind her, but didn’t fully close it. “Switching on torch.” Alex swung the beam wide. “Wow, I didn’t expect this. Looks like the lower levels of some old building. Remember to check maps in local library for what else had been built on this site. No sign of a mine entrance yet.”

Her torch picked out shapes; broken chairs, up turned tables, an old filing cabinet, even a bed frame. Alex walked on, passing through several doors, most of them hanging drunkenly off their hinges. Then she reached a point where corridors ran off in several directions.

Alex took a deep breath. “Right, I seem to have reached some kind of nexus point. This place is becoming a labyrinth. The corridor to my right slopes down. If there is a mine under all this, I’m betting it’s down there. Much as I hate to say it looks like c0nundrum might be on to something after all. This place doesn’t feel right. Proverbial hairs on the back of my neck are standing up like soldiers.”

“Damn,” said Alex and turned off the mike. She didn’t want to admit even to herself that she hadn’t brought the

right equipment with her. "I should have believed him. Damn. Damn." She turned the mike back on.

"I'm going to go a little way down the corridor that seems to lead down. I'm going to try and get an impression of what kind of equipment I'll need when I come back. See if this is going to be a whole rope and climbing gear stunt or crawling through rubble?"

As she went forward the corridor narrowed, the roof lowered and at some point she realised she was surrounded only by jagged rock. "I believe I've found where the old mine starts," she said. "Air smells stale. Thinking of turning back soon."

Alex knew the wise thing to do was to back out, but her curiosity kept whispering to her just one bit more, just one little bit more. Any minute the shaft might open up into a huge cavern and then she would see whatever c0nundrum had sent her to find.

She was deep underground when she heard it. From up head, far too close for comfort came a roar. It was the kind of vicious, rolling roar that made it quite clear whatever it was didn't want you down here and couldn't wait to get its hands, paws, tentacles, or whatever it had for appendages, on to you and that when it did it wouldn't be shaking hands and asking to be your friend. Alex froze, considering her options.

Her fingers found the small disc in her pocket. Then her torch-beam dimmed. "Crap," whispered Alex to the mike. She shook the torch hard.

Footsteps, loud as rolling thunder, echoed through the tunnel. If she held her place long enough would she be able to see what it was? Most people would have turned and run, but not Alex Morgan. Her desire to see this creature was winning over her survival instinct, which was screaming at her to run. Ghosts, evil spirits, and illusions