

# Excerpt Liberty Epic of Shadows

## The Prologue

Shadows slither into shadows behind two wraiths descending serpentine through obscure corridors leading to a prehistoric vault buried within the labyrinth depths. Tumorous veins glisten on limestone walls, bleeding sweat of unrecorded centuries trapped within these oppressive passages. Darkness so dark, as to devour completely feeble flame of a burning torch, smothered by another presence reeking out of even greater blackness trapped below.

Here continues the faint pulse of something from long ago and lost to human consciousness. Here indwells living soul of this rival civilization discovered at the end of the world. Spawn of a presence buried in catacomb maze of a grand ziggurat old as the ancient tombs of Egypt awaiting zodiac rebirth. They call this architecture *Pyramid of the Sun*, a geometry constructed by the gods to enshrine glitter of earthly riches, temple of waiting Mammon soon to awaken from sleep.

The two emissaries from different worlds only eye each other apprehensively; neither trusting the other, both prepared for more blood. No words exchanged, the time for words long passed. The King had welcomed this man of marvelous appearance with such gifts of oblation that should have satisfied the desire of any deity. Would a stranger have known the ancient scrolls so well, or the expectant longing in a King's soul? Could one born of mortal vision have conjured so perfectly the timely arrival of this grandiose presence adorned in shining armor and seated regally upon an anthropomorphic white beast never before seen?

The King of Tenochtitlan remembers well the day this Spaniard arrives with legions on the steps of the grand city. From beginning, they call his name Quetzalcoatl. How readily they accept this god with gifts of oblation, as children might revere the return of a long departed father. Now the King and all his citizens have fallen unwilling hostages to this unpredictable foreigner with eyes of a devil! His only interest the gold and silver belonging to the Aztec gods--his true devotion pledged to a regent seated upon the throne of another principality across the vast sea!

The mighty Shaman priests slaughtered first, along with hosts of terrible protectorates, by the fire sticks that spit smoke and death. Then an emboldened alliance with the King's neighboring enemies, followed by plagues of unknown disease released upon his kingdom. All lost--so many dead, as even now the streets of the grand ziggurat city run red with the blood of weak resistance. No power left to save them now--no earthly force greater than the evil of this man and his army. Now awake in a nightmare, the last monarch of Tenochtitlan considers the precarious future of his conquered nation. If it is only wealth of the empire they want, then pray let these men of strange customs have it all and be gone! Do these Spaniards not know to whom the gold really belongs? The gods will exact their own vengeance in course, as always has been the curse of this reserved treasure!

They enter into an enormous hall that travels along the interior base of the grand pyramid guarded by statues of frog-like creatures and the twisted faces of animal gods. Perhaps the Shaman Priest would have led the way into a gauntlet of demonic passages laced with deadly booby traps. The king provided knowledge of only one access. Besides--this Conquistador is a shrewd one, able to sense subterfuge, charmed with the luck of destiny! Would some other way have made any difference?

Arriving at a dead-end wall, the last monarch of Tenochtitlan reaches apprehensively his hand into the camouflaged recess of a concealed crevice and pulls a lever. The wall pivots slowly inward, a bone grinding grate of rock against rock, triggering precision sequences of weights and counter weights of carefully designed mechanisms concealed somewhere within the structure.

The Conquistador raises his hand against the flood of sudden brilliance. Never in his dreams could he have imagined such a presence. A giant rises majestically before him adorned with such riches as to corrupt the soul of any mortal. This demon sculpted upon a burning pillar of pure gold straddles the vast chamber mounted upon an ornate base studded with fiery jewels that symbolize mere pretty ornaments to the natives of this distant land. By some ingenious arrangement of polished mirrors, sunlight reflects through quartz windows placed at the peak of a temple the King of the Aztec calls *Pyramid of the Sun*. The pit suddenly ignited by burning mounds of gold, silver, and gleaming precious stones. The legends are true after all! The Sovereign of Spain will receive at last bounty of an earthly estate!

"Por la gloria de España!" Proclaims this man sent from beyond the ocean horizon.

Removing his glistening helmet, the man known as Quetzalcoatl fills to the brim the cask with forbidden treasure. Then ascending victorious over the subjugated sovereign, he becomes as the shadow of a dark angel etched

against the consuming light. Presence of mortal man made truly in the image of a god! Only now does the fallen monarch know name and intent of the harbinger commissioned by a foreign principality. Now that it is too late, this king of foolish dreams comprehends future fate of his lost kingdom. Aware the Pandora Box opened, rupturing poisoned lust destined to bleed course of rebellion, as it has bled since the beginning of time,

The early settlers to arrive on the swampy inlet known today as Mexico call the Aztec valley Anahuac, a word meaning *'surrounded by water.'* Here they witness the sign of an eagle perched upon a cactus, and receive divine instruction to build the first foundations upon the soggy inlet isles of Lake Texcoco. After making a treaty with the neighboring city-states of the Texcocans and Tacubans, the Aztecs remain secure in the belief of immunity from foreign invasion. Through many centuries, they flourish prosperously, serving the capricious whims of their bloodthirsty gods, thinking themselves center of the universe. Never could they have imagined a peril of such magnitude against their rooted principality. Never has a force of such military superiority come against them, as the one invited openly into their peaceful metropolis. They are the first to fall of many once great empires. The systematic conquest and looting of the New World continents begins.

The Aztec Empire represents the premier collapse of the great Mesoamerican societies that succumb to momentum of the Holy League of European colonial invasion determined to dominate the world. Thirty years earlier in the summer of 1492 Italian explorer, Christopher Columbus, sets sail from the coast of Spain with three ships to cross the great expanse of unmapped ocean in quest for riches of the West Indies. That same summer Queen Isabella the First, and Ferdinand the Second, issue the Alhambra Decree, forcing all practicing Jews out of their joint kingdoms. The Basque registered *Santa Maria*, along with two smaller ships, named *La Pinta* and *La Nina* bravely navigate uncharted seas manned by poorer citizens, fortune hunters, and some now without a country. They land on an island in the Caribbean, christened Hispaniola--but here Columbus finds no gold.

After this fruitless expedition, future explorers learn from the indigenous populations about vast resources of wealth on the nearby isles. King Ferdinand of Spain commands the treasures extracted and transported back at any cost. First Santo Domingo, followed by Cuba, as both surrender their catches of gold and silver. Mapping out the chain of landmasses spread upon the turquoise ocean, like inviting breadcrumbs, dedicated seekers of wealth unearth even greater buried riches hidden on Puerto Rico and Jamaica, rewarding the local populations of these islanders with slaughter.

It is not until 1519, the Conquistador Don Hernan Cortes de Monroy y Pizarro Altamirano, arrives on the steps of Tenochtitlan City, making claim to this New World's tangible resources and adding citizenry to the successful new Spanish Empire. Other Conquistadors follow in the steps of Cortez, marching their armies south from the valley of Teotihuacán, where there are plazas of the dead laced with intertwining streets, surrounding pyramids named the *Sun* and the *Moon*, appropriately named *Avenues of the Dead*. These fallen ruins rumored once to be the earthly habitations of the local gods.

From here into the Yucatan, they search for riches belonging to the Mayans. These armored conquerors arrive in fleets of strong seafaring Galleons built to transport armies of invasion. They return to mother Spain laden with the pillaged wealth of many fallen kingdoms. These armadas sail from Guatemala to Panama, establishing the safe harbor of Portobello, conquering and pillaging all in their path. Cutting into the Isthmus, they fight their way to the port city of Potonchan and make anchor at the city of Chontal, where the unsuspecting populations welcome them at the beginning into their garden metropolises with open arms. These Conquistadors desire no peace--only the gold! North, and then south again, they pierce into the jungles of clandestine citadels, where the rain and mosquitoes never cease. They burn city after city, slaughtering the indigenous populations--their reason no longer human, but possessed by zealous madness, changed wicked by the love of *Mammon* and all that is his to give. Judged invaders from another quarter of the world, they fulfill in measure every apocalyptic prophecy, littering streets with human carnage and rivers engorged with blood. These harbingers of greed stop at nothing, until every ounce of treasure runs into the bellies of their ballasted ships commissioned from another part of the globe.

Through thick jungles laced with infected malaria pools, they push on into the southern frontier of this new unexplored continent. Here they find a flourishing civilization, home to the mighty Incas, an empire extending thousands of miles from the north equator, to the highland ruins of Machu Picchu on the slopes of the Andes in Peru.

Through dispatch of messages sent back to the strong new empire, they describe inconceivable riches, grand cities centuries old rising magnificently out of surrounding jungles, or perched on stepped plateaus. These *Soldiers of Fortune* driven by command and by greed strike deep into the naval of the world, until gouging into the capital city of Cuzco. They commit crimes of genocide, ravaging diver's places without conscience. They decimate temples, trample city dwellings, and subdue resistance of even the strongest Shaman led armies. All this they do in the name of a *Holy Alliance* to accomplish a revived vision of God's will on earth, unconscious that the soul of a man not justified by the measure of wealth clutched in mortal hand. Nor that interpretation of scripture justified through deception of carnal appetite.

Soon even the proud Incas on the southern banks of the Great River fall to the superior armored forces wielding two-edged swords forged in steel and long lances with points of sharpened iron. Neither the enchanted frog people, nor the many conjured dark forces can stand against the fierceness of these foreign emissaries. In time, even final resistance of the great Inca Empire forced to bow down in defeat. All made to pay tributes of gold and silver to their new sovereign, as have the subjugated Aztecs and the Mayans to the north. The many Inca idols melted into bricks of bright bullion, minted into coins, and loaded into hulls of strong seafaring ships arriving daily from across the seas.

The wealth of these conquered nations transported across the world and funneled into the coiffures of a growing European Confederation for more than a century. Joined by the Portuguese and the French, mighty Spain will eventually become protectorate of the revived *Holy Roman Empire* ruled by the Catholic House of Hapsburg, providing ships and wealth to this insatiable new world order intent upon establishing an earthly vision of God's kingdom. These Kings of Hapsburgs reach into all corners of the globe, assimilating every society from Africa to the Indies, and borders beyond, as raging fire consuming stubble. Through these ashes spreads the phoenix wings of Renaissance that has already begun to overshadow the world with another kind of blindness.

Even during turbulent transitions of history and alliances, riches from the new Americas continue to flow through the centuries into the bulging bellies of masterfully constructed Spanish Transport Armadas. Men of cruel ambition volunteer on missions of exploration in search of answers to obscure legends shrouded in these malaria-infested jungles. Some begin to turn their dark imaginations into quest for even greater treasures. Fabled magic fountains that promise eternal youth, for power in animal masks, special shields, and enchanted weapons to make one so armed invincible. Things conjured through evil incantations, mighty demon-possessed creatures endowed with extraordinary force. Even these seekers of the occult compelled by an even darker desire, as they fill their bosoms with shining souvenirs forged from the earth of these invaded lands.

Gold—the *legendary Pieces of Eight*—brightly minted new coins, embossed with the imperial insignia of the richest monarchy on earth. Treasures gathered from storehouses, spilling along the grand slopes of some of the world's highest mountains, and into deep sunless valleys. Dark places where the Amazon, the Negro, and the Tocantins flow. Caravans of wealth transported through sunless rainforest jungles, and emptied into insatiable bellies of waiting armadas.

Grand galleons—work-horses of the seas—ships that anchor daily in safe harbors, loaded with missionaries, new architectures, and disease unknown to the New World populations. They return to motherlands of the Empire loaded beyond capacity with slaves, precious stones, and silver. Still the greatest treasure held in these hulls, a cargo of even stronger caskets overflowed with freshly smelted gold doubloons bearing the stamp of an imperial crest.

And still the mammon of this world streams irresistibly through time as a canker worm in florescent pools; a glittering promise of excess to consume men's souls like moths drawn into flames of perdition. In each generation emissaries of light sewn together with shades, and mingled in the shadows of progressive history. A few receiving vision far exceeding the illumination of powers visible. These sent unaware to proclaim testimony of greater witness than acquisitions calculated through quantum measure. Names written in another chronicle not found in ledgers of clockwork genealogies carefully prepared. So begins again this *Epic of Shadows*.