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00:00:00,000 --> 00:00:06,000

Tonight, a famed ancient city overflowing with gold.

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00:00:06,000 --> 00:00:09,000

The legend of El Dorado takes hold amongst the Spanish,

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00:00:09,000 --> 00:00:12,000

and people start looking for it everywhere.

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00:00:12,000 --> 00:00:18,000

For centuries, explorers seeking it find only disappointment or death.

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00:00:18,000 --> 00:00:22,000

It's less a quest for gold and more a fight for survival.

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Now we reveal the top theories surrounding this legendary city.

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Pictures from space show what appears to be rivers of gold weaving through the area.

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00:00:33,000 --> 00:00:38,000

There could be a lost golden city right there under the rainforest canopy.

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00:00:38,000 --> 00:00:43,000

There's not just one golden city. There's multiple golden cities.

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00:00:43,000 --> 00:00:48,000

Does El Dorado exist? And if so, where could it be?

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00:00:57,000 --> 00:00:59,000

El Dorado

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00:01:07,000 --> 00:01:09,000

March 1537.

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For nearly 20 years, the Spanish have been on a mission to conquer South America

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00:01:15,000 --> 00:01:19,000

with their infamous army of conquistadors.

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As part of that mission, Chief Magistrate Gonzalo Jiménez de Quezada

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00:01:25,000 --> 00:01:32,000

leads an expedition to find an overland route from present-day Colombia to Peru.

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De Quezada and his men have been tasked with finding a way around or over or through

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00:01:39,000 --> 00:01:46,000

the Andes Mountains, a long mountain range that has proven to be an obstacle to the Spanish conquistadors.

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00:01:46,000 --> 00:01:52,000

It's a brutal trek. There's bad weather. It's cold. There's disease.

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00:01:52,000 --> 00:01:57,000

The men are really ready to give up. But then, De Quezada hears a rumor

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00:01:57,000 --> 00:02:00,000

that causes him to completely change his mission.

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00:02:01,000 --> 00:02:06,000

The rumor. A city filled with gold.

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00:02:06,000 --> 00:02:10,000

This is absolute music to De Quezada's ears because for Spanish conquistadors,

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00:02:10,000 --> 00:02:13,000

nothing is more important than gold.

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00:02:13,000 --> 00:02:17,000

For decades, the Spanish have been exploring Central and South America

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00:02:17,000 --> 00:02:23,000

and conquering its peoples. Along the way, they've sent back ships filled with tons of gold

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00:02:23,000 --> 00:02:28,000

and stories of unbelievable wealth to be found in the Americas.

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00:02:28,000 --> 00:02:36,000

Stories of what is waiting to still be found, unlimited resources, unlimited land,

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00:02:36,000 --> 00:02:41,000

unlimited food and wealth were believed to be possible.

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00:02:41,000 --> 00:02:45,000

The problem is, by the time De Quezada gets to South America,

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00:02:45,000 --> 00:02:49,000

most of the easy-to-find stories of gold have already been plundered.

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00:02:49,000 --> 00:02:55,000

Now he's desperate to know, where is this so-called golden village?

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As De Quezada's troops press further south, they encounter the indigenous Moisica people.

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00:03:03,000 --> 00:03:08,000

The Moisica are as advanced as the Aztec, Inca or even the Maya,

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00:03:08,000 --> 00:03:12,000

but they aren't as warlike or even really as organized.

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00:03:12,000 --> 00:03:15,000

They're more like a loose confederation of tribes,

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00:03:15,000 --> 00:03:20,000

but they're known as skilled metal workers and their medal of choice is gold.

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00:03:20,000 --> 00:03:26,000

Gold has no monetary value for them. They use it because it's soft and easy to work with,

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00:03:26,000 --> 00:03:33,000

but it also has a spiritual significance for them because the Moisica's god, Cheminagagua, is a sun

god,

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00:03:33,000 --> 00:03:36,000

and gold shines like the sun.

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00:03:36,000 --> 00:03:41,000

This suggested to Quezada that there was more where it came from

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00:03:41,000 --> 00:03:43,000

and he was going to go find it.

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00:03:43,000 --> 00:03:50,000

De Quezada's men quickly overpower the Moisica and interrogate them about where to find gold.

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00:03:50,000 --> 00:03:58,000

The Moisica people describe a ritual to De Quezada in which a new leader is coronated

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00:03:58,000 --> 00:04:02,000

and the ritual entails this new leader, he will be called the Zipa.

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00:04:02,000 --> 00:04:09,000

He is covered in a sticky substance that then is covered with gold dust.

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00:04:09,000 --> 00:04:13,000

Then they take him out to the middle of a sacred lake on a raft

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00:04:13,000 --> 00:04:18,000

and they put gold statues, figurines and jewels on the raft

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00:04:18,000 --> 00:04:23,000

and there are thousands of Moisica people standing on the banks watching all of this.

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00:04:23,000 --> 00:04:29,000

At which point the chieftain immerses himself in the lake, cleansing himself of the gold dust

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00:04:29,000 --> 00:04:35,000

and the attendants throw trinkets and gold objects into the middle of the lake.

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00:04:35,000 --> 00:04:40,000

Thousands of people are along the banks also throwing gold themselves.

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00:04:40,000 --> 00:04:45,000

And when that man emerges, he is the new chief, the Zipa, of the community

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00:04:45,000 --> 00:04:52,000

and he is known importantly as El Dorado, the golden man.

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00:04:52,000 --> 00:04:57,000

Although it's just a story of a man, De Quezada considers this to be something much bigger.

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00:04:57,000 --> 00:05:01,000

He thinks of this man as a golden king who must live in a golden kingdom

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00:05:01,000 --> 00:05:04,000

and therefore all he has to do is find it.

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00:05:04,000 --> 00:05:10,000

Inspired by the story of the Moisica, De Quezada believes he'll find the golden city

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00:05:10,000 --> 00:05:16,000

on the shores of a nearby lake.

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00:05:16,000 --> 00:05:23,000

The Spanish press on and soon De Quezada comes upon a body of water called Lake Guadavida.

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Lake Guadavida is located about 35 miles northeast of Bogotá.

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It's a really beautiful, almost supernatural or eerie place.

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00:05:34,000 --> 00:05:38,000

The lake is almost perfectly round. It's surrounded by trees.

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00:05:38,000 --> 00:05:42,000

It reflects the sky. It reflects the environment around it.

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00:05:42,000 --> 00:05:47,000

There's no obvious city on its shores, but De Quezada still thinks this is the place.

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00:05:47,000 --> 00:05:54,000

He thinks this city must have either been abandoned or perhaps it lies underwater.

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00:05:54,000 --> 00:05:58,000

The Spanish think that all they need to do is get to the bottom of the lake

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00:05:58,000 --> 00:06:02,000

and they can recover all this golden jewels that have been thrown in.

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00:06:02,000 --> 00:06:12,000

De Quezada is here in the mid-1500s, so the technology to get underwater simply isn't available.

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00:06:12,000 --> 00:06:16,000

To get to the treasure, they assume they're going to have to drain the entire lake.

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00:06:16,000 --> 00:06:23,000

It's an insane amount of manual labor, but they have a captive workforce.

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00:06:23,000 --> 00:06:32,000

Two conquistadors, Lazaro Fonte and De Quezada's own brother, Hernán Perez De Quezada, come up with a plan.

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00:06:32,000 --> 00:06:37,000

They are going to empty out this entire lake by hand.

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00:06:37,000 --> 00:06:44,000

They essentially form this huge bucket chain using the brute force of these captured Indigenous people.

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00:06:44,000 --> 00:06:50,000

They'd spend months taking the water out of Lake Guadavida one bucket at a time.

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00:06:50,000 --> 00:06:57,000

Progress is painfully slow. After three months, they haven't come close to their goal.

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00:06:57,000 --> 00:07:06,000

They manage to drop the water level about 10 feet and they do find some pieces of gold in the mud that they manage to expose.

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00:07:06,000 --> 00:07:11,000

It's not nothing, but it's certainly no lavish city of gold.

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00:07:11,000 --> 00:07:17,000

Their bounty ends up being worth about \$100,000 in today's money. Certainly not a fortune.

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00:07:17,000 --> 00:07:25,000

Without the technology to explore any further, hundreds of years pass with no new discoveries.

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Then, in the late 1800s, a British entrepreneur is inspired to investigate.

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00:07:32,000 --> 00:07:37,000

In 1898, Hartley Knowles hears about De Quezada's efforts.

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00:07:37,000 --> 00:07:42,000

He has started the company for the exploration of the lagoon at Guadavida,

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00:07:42,000 --> 00:07:48,000

and he now is taking his turn at getting to that gold.

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00:07:48,000 --> 00:07:54,000

What's different now is that it's the turn of the century and Britain is an industrial powerhouse,

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00:07:54,000 --> 00:07:57,000

so he has much better equipment at his disposal.

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00:07:57,000 --> 00:08:01,000

They bring in a massive steam pump, an earth-moving equipment,

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00:08:01,000 --> 00:08:06,000

to dig a huge tunnel under the middle of Guadavida and start to drain it.

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00:08:06,000 --> 00:08:13,000

After six years, the lake is finally emptied, but what remains is another problem.

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00:08:13,000 --> 00:08:16,000

Hartley Knowles manages to get to the bottom of the lake.

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00:08:16,000 --> 00:08:21,000

The problem is, when he gets to the bottom of it, there's silt and mud and hard pan,

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00:08:21,000 --> 00:08:28,000

and as it's baked in the sun, it becomes cement, and so they have to abandon the project.

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00:08:28,000 --> 00:08:33,000

After spending all that time and money, Knowles and his company only end up finding about

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00:08:33,000 --> 00:08:36,000

30 to 40 golden artifacts in the mud.

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00:08:36,000 --> 00:08:40,000

They're auctioned off at Sotheby's in London in 1909,

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00:08:40,000 --> 00:08:46,000

and they're sold for a whopping total of 500 British pounds.

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00:08:46,000 --> 00:08:49,000

And unsurprisingly, the company goes bankrupt.

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00:08:49,000 --> 00:08:55,000

By 1965, Lake Guadavida has been almost ruined,

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00:08:55,000 --> 00:08:59,000

and the Colombian government has decided that it's had enough.

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00:08:59,000 --> 00:09:04,000

The government bans any further exploration of Lake Guadavida,

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00:09:04,000 --> 00:09:07,000

officially ending the quest for El Dorado here.

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00:09:07,000 --> 00:09:15,000

But Lake Guadavida was not the only candidate for the location of El Dorado, not by a long shot.

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00:09:18,000 --> 00:09:26,000

When Spanish conquistador Gonzalo Jiménez de Quezada spreads a rumor of a lost city of gold in 1537,

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00:09:26,000 --> 00:09:30,000

others quickly expand the search far and wide.

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00:09:30,000 --> 00:09:34,000

The legend of El Dorado starts to take hold amongst the Spanish,

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00:09:34,000 --> 00:09:36,000

and so they look everywhere all over South America.

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00:09:36,000 --> 00:09:40,000

Many of these soldiers have come looking for gold, and they haven't seen much of it yet.

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00:09:40,000 --> 00:09:45,000

Among the inspired conquistadors is Gonzalo Pizarro.

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00:09:45,000 --> 00:09:50,000

He's the half-brother of Francisco Pizarro, the man who conquered the Inca Empire

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00:09:50,000 --> 00:09:53,000

and brought boatloads of gold back to Spain.

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00:09:53,000 --> 00:09:58,000

Because of the strength of his last name, Pizarro has been made the vice governor in Quito,

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00:09:58,000 --> 00:10:04,000

which is modern-day Ecuador, but he has bigger ambitions than just being the local vice governor.

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00:10:04,000 --> 00:10:14,000

In 1541, four years after de Quezada's expedition, Pizarro sets out on his own quest to find El Dorado.

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00:10:14,000 --> 00:10:21,000

Pizarro enlists the help of his childhood friend and cousin Francisco de Oriana.

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00:10:22,000 --> 00:10:25,000

Pizarro speaks to a different indigenous group in Ecuador,

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00:10:25,000 --> 00:10:31,000

and he's told that the gold that de Quezada seeks is actually much further south than where he's looking.

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00:10:31,000 --> 00:10:37,000

It's some 600 miles south, and it's not even in the Andes Mountain region.

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00:10:37,000 --> 00:10:40,000

Avoiding the mountain sounds like a really good idea to Pizarro,

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00:10:40,000 --> 00:10:43,000

but he doesn't realize this new destination is just as treacherous.

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00:10:43,000 --> 00:10:49,000

According to his sources, El Dorado sits on the shores of a river deep in the Amazon rainforest.

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00:10:52,000 --> 00:11:03,000

In February 1541, the two men leave Quito with 340 Spaniards and some 4,000 Indigenous people.

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00:11:03,000 --> 00:11:08,000

They head due east across the Andes, then down into the lowlands,

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00:11:08,000 --> 00:11:13,000

then toward the far southeast of Ecuador, where the Amazon rainforest begins.

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00:11:13,000 --> 00:11:19,000

They end up being some of the first Europeans to explore the Amazon jungle.

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00:11:19,000 --> 00:11:22,000

But they are not remotely ready for it.

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00:11:22,000 --> 00:11:31,000

It's hot, it's humid, and the growth is so dense that they have to use their swords to hack their way through it.

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00:11:31,000 --> 00:11:36,000

They have natives with them that they've brought, but the natives are from the mountain region,

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00:11:36,000 --> 00:11:40,000

so they are also unprepared for this sort of climate.

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00:11:40,000 --> 00:11:45,000

And as time goes on and they struggle more and more, they begin to be hungry,

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00:11:45,000 --> 00:11:48,000

people begin to get sick, and some of them begin to die.

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00:11:53,000 --> 00:11:59,000

It's almost like the harder the trek becomes, the more convinced Pizarro is that El Dorado is just around the corner.

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00:11:59,000 --> 00:12:04,000

He becomes consumed with finding this city. Nothing else seems to matter.

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00:12:04,000 --> 00:12:11,000

He drives these suffering men further southeast looking for this river that will ultimately lead him to gold.

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00:12:12,000 --> 00:12:18,000

Every time the Spanish encounter any indigenous in the jungle, he's out of questions them where the city of gold is.

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00:12:18,000 --> 00:12:21,000

And they always tell him, keep going, you'll encounter it eventually.

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00:12:22,000 --> 00:12:28,000

After 11 months, the crew has traveled nearly 200 miles with nothing to show for it.

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00:12:29,000 --> 00:12:37,000

By the time Pizarro's company gets to the banks of the Cocoa River, most of his men are either dead, dying, or very sick.

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00:12:37,000 --> 00:12:42,000

They've lost 3,000 natives and 140 conquistadors.

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00:12:42,000 --> 00:12:46,000

They've run out of food, eating their horses to stay alive.

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00:12:46,000 --> 00:12:50,000

It's less a quest for gold and more a fight for survival.

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00:12:51,000 --> 00:12:58,000

The expedition is on the verge of mutiny, and so they make a plan to build a boat to travel down the river.

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00:12:58,000 --> 00:13:09,000

On December 26th, 1541, Pizarro tells his partner Oriana to take 50 men in the boat down the river to find food and bring it back to the rest of the team.

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00:13:09,000 --> 00:13:13,000

The current of the river is strong, so Oriana makes very good time.

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00:13:13,000 --> 00:13:21,000

Unfortunately, it's 14 days before they find any food, and because of the current, they realize there's no way to turn around and go back.

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00:13:21,000 --> 00:13:24,000

So they decide to just keep going forward.

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00:13:25,000 --> 00:13:33,000

Oriana has all the men sign a document saying that they understand what they're doing, but they had no other choice.

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00:13:33,000 --> 00:13:42,000

Oriana knows this may end up being useful later because they may be considered traitors and sentenced to be executed.

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00:13:43,000 --> 00:13:50,000

After one month, Pizarro realizes his old friend is not coming back.

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00:13:50,000 --> 00:13:57,000

Pizarro thinks maybe they were attacked by a hostile tribe, but he also starts to wonder if maybe his cousin has betrayed him.

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00:13:57,000 --> 00:14:02,000

He thinks, if I had found El Dorado, would I come back?

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00:14:02,000 --> 00:14:16,000

Gonzalo Pizarro takes the remnant men who were stranded on the side of the river and arrives back in Quito, literally shoeless and in rags, and he vows that he'd be ever sees Oriana again.

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00:14:16,000 --> 00:14:18,000

He's going to kill him.

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00:14:19,000 --> 00:14:22,000

Meanwhile, Oriana continues his journey.

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00:14:22,000 --> 00:14:28,000

The swift current has carried Oriana's team even farther, and they still haven't seen any trace of a city of gold.

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00:14:28,000 --> 00:14:31,000

Eventually, they meet up with the much larger Amazon River.

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00:14:31,000 --> 00:14:36,000

He figures this is the sacred body of water that will eventually lead to El Dorado.

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00:14:36,000 --> 00:14:39,000

At first, it seems he might be right.

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00:14:39,000 --> 00:14:48,000

As they get further into the Amazon basin, they start to see these great settlements, thriving cities with people all adorned in gold.

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00:14:48,000 --> 00:14:52,000

These locals feed the Spanish and even teach them some of their language.

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00:14:52,000 --> 00:14:58,000

As the Spanish keep going, they hear stories of even bigger, more opulent cities deeper in the jungle.

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00:14:59,000 --> 00:15:05,000

But the farther they travel, the less friendly those encounters get.

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00:15:05,000 --> 00:15:15,000

They start running into native groups that are defensive and then native groups that are attacking them and keeping them from being able to land anywhere on shore.

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00:15:15,000 --> 00:15:19,000

One of these attacks actually leads to the naming of the Amazon River.

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00:15:19,000 --> 00:15:28,000

It doesn't have a name until June 24th, 1542, when Oriana and his men are attacked by a local tribe where the women fight right alongside the men.

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00:15:28,000 --> 00:15:34,000

He refers to these women as Amazonas, based on the mythical Greek women warriors described by Herodotus.

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00:15:34,000 --> 00:15:40,000

Oriana starts calling the area the River of the Amazons, and the name sticks.

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00:15:40,000 --> 00:15:49,000

Finally, after eight months and over 3,000 miles, Oriana and his crew reach the Atlantic Ocean.

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00:15:49,000 --> 00:15:59,000

Even though he doesn't know it yet, Oriana has just successfully traveled the entire length of the world's longest river, and he's the first European to do so.

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00:15:59,000 --> 00:16:04,000

But unfortunately, he does it without reaching El Dorado.

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00:16:04,000 --> 00:16:09,000

Word of Oriana's voyage reaches Quito and eventually Spain.

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00:16:09,000 --> 00:16:14,000

Pizarro hears the news, and he accuses his cousin of treason, hoping to get him hanged.

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00:16:14,000 --> 00:16:22,000

But in the end, because of the document that the entire crew signed and that detailed log that they kept, Oriana is found not guilty,

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00:16:22,000 --> 00:16:28,000

and he returns safely to Spain where he's welcomed by King Charles I as sort of a celebrity.

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00:16:29,000 --> 00:16:36,000

Once Oriana is back in Spain, he has pretty much one goal, and that is to get back to South America.

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00:16:36,000 --> 00:16:44,000

He is convinced that he came so close to finding the real El Dorado.

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00:16:44,000 --> 00:16:51,000

He basically makes the pitch to everyone that he can do this, that he will find the city of gold,

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00:16:51,000 --> 00:17:00,000

that if he gets the supplies and the funding and the crew that he needs, he will be able to go straight to El Dorado itself.

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00:17:00,000 --> 00:17:09,000

His pitch works. In May of 1545, Francisco de Oriana heads back into the Amazon.

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00:17:09,000 --> 00:17:18,000

It's his second expedition to find El Dorado, but this time he knows exactly where he needs to go, and he's completely confident that he's going to get there.

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00:17:22,000 --> 00:17:35,000

Spanish explorer Francisco de Oriana's first attempt to find El Dorado has failed, but in 1545, he's ready to try again.

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00:17:35,000 --> 00:17:44,000

His previous expedition operated under the assumption that El Dorado is in the far western region of the Amazon rainforest, in what's now Ecuador.

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00:17:44,000 --> 00:17:47,000

After a disastrous attempt, they couldn't find it there.

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00:17:47,000 --> 00:17:55,000

But as Oriana traveled east along the Amazon River, in what's now Brazil, he saw larger cities with indigenous there adorned in gold.

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00:17:55,000 --> 00:18:00,000

And it's in that area in which he believes he will find El Dorado.

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00:18:02,000 --> 00:18:11,000

Last time, after attacks by native peoples, Oriana wasn't really able to get very far from shore and really explore these cities or what lies beyond.

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00:18:11,000 --> 00:18:13,000

So that's what he's going to do this time.

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00:18:14,000 --> 00:18:19,000

On May 11th, 1545, Oriana departs from Spain.

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00:18:19,000 --> 00:18:29,000

The disaster of his previous expedition is fresh in his mind, so he is attempting to be more than prepared this time around.

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00:18:29,000 --> 00:18:39,000

He brings four ships, more than 300 men, and supplies to build an additional two ships when they get to the mouth of the Amazon to help them navigate up the river.

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00:18:39,000 --> 00:18:45,000

He has everything he needs. He knows the way. This time, he can't fail.

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00:18:45,000 --> 00:18:55,000

They sail first to the Spanish-controlled Canary Islands, where they spend the first couple of months loaning supplies, getting the ships ready for the open seas, and recruiting more men.

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00:18:56,000 --> 00:19:05,000

The next planned stop is the Cape Verde Islands, off the west coast of Africa, which the Spanish also control.

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00:19:05,000 --> 00:19:14,000

It's here where Oriana's expedition starts to really unravel. There's an epidemic that kills 98 of his men, and then another 60 of them desert.

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00:19:14,000 --> 00:19:22,000

He's down so many sailors that he decides to abandon one of his ships entirely and cross the Atlantic with just the remaining three ships.

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00:19:23,000 --> 00:19:31,000

The Atlantic crossing is a disaster from the outset. One of his ships is blown off course and he

never sees it again.

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00:19:31,000 --> 00:19:42,000

This costs Oriana an additional 77 men, more supplies, and all of the material that they were going to use to build those additional two ships to navigate up the Amazon.

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00:19:42,000 --> 00:19:51,000

In spite of that, on December 20th, 1545, Oriana arrives on the east coast of Brazil.

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00:19:51,000 --> 00:20:05,000

When he arrives, he has only two ships and fewer than 100 men. This is not a promising start to what he knows is going to be a difficult expedition.

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00:20:05,000 --> 00:20:16,000

Thankfully, there's a lot of food where they land and the natives are friendly, so Oriana's men suggest that they just make camp and regroup for a little while.

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00:20:16,000 --> 00:20:23,000

But Oriana is so eager to find El Dorado that he says, nope, on we go.

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00:20:23,000 --> 00:20:32,000

Oriana may have been here before, but this time he gets lost. The mouth of the Amazon is a wild tangle of tributaries.

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00:20:32,000 --> 00:20:39,000

The group travels over 300 miles trying to find the entrance of the Amazon River. The journey is over before it's begun.

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00:20:39,000 --> 00:20:46,000

They never even got anywhere near El Dorado. In fact, they never even got into the main Amazon River itself.

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00:20:46,000 --> 00:20:50,000

And if El Dorado is hiding deep in Brazil, they'll never know.

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00:20:50,000 --> 00:20:59,000

In the end, less than 40 of the original 300 men survive by making it back to the island of Margarita, just west of Trinidad.

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00:21:00,000 --> 00:21:04,000

After the collapse of Oriana's expedition, he's basically branded a liar.

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00:21:04,000 --> 00:21:12,000

People began to suspect that he made the whole thing up or maybe that he was just covering up for having abandoned Pizarro,

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00:21:12,000 --> 00:21:17,000

or that he just wanted to secure funding for his next expedition.

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00:21:17,000 --> 00:21:21,000

But the rumors of El Dorado sitting somewhere along the Amazon persist.

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00:21:21,000 --> 00:21:29,000

And over the next hundred years, a handful of other expeditions to Brazil are launched, all of which turn up nothing.

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00:21:30,000 --> 00:21:37,000

Eventually, the search for El Dorado in the Amazon appears to die out.

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00:21:37,000 --> 00:21:46,000

Then in December 2020, astronauts on board the International Space Station spot something peculiar near Bolivia.

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00:21:46,000 --> 00:21:52,000

Pictures from space show what appears to be rivers of gold weaving through the area.

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00:21:52,000 --> 00:21:59,000

They turn out to be illegal gold mining operations and they are huge, which is obvious if you can see them from space.

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00:22:00,000 --> 00:22:07,000

This evidence reignites a modern-day hunt for El Dorado, this time in a whole new area.

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00:22:08,000 --> 00:22:18,000

In 2022, a team of researchers led by Heiko Prumers from the German Archaeological Institute

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00:22:18,000 --> 00:22:26,000

head to the Bolivian Rainforest to do 3D scanning of the landscape from the air.

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00:22:26,000 --> 00:22:30,000

And what these researchers discover is absolutely amazing.

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00:22:30,000 --> 00:22:35,000

It appears to be an ancient civilization that's been lost for centuries.

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00:22:35,000 --> 00:22:41,000

There are pyramids 60 feet high, rectangular structures, paths and roads.

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00:22:41,000 --> 00:22:44,000

It's like a city hidden inside the rainforest.

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00:22:45,000 --> 00:22:51,000

The team estimates this settlement was abandoned nearly 500 years ago.

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00:22:51,000 --> 00:22:55,000

Around the same time, the conquistadors arrive.

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00:22:55,000 --> 00:23:03,000

Prumers estimates that it might have taken researchers centuries to find these cities in the jungle,

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00:23:03,000 --> 00:23:08,000

but the LiDAR technology allowed them to find it in a matter of days.

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00:23:08,000 --> 00:23:12,000

So the media seizes on this story. I mean, who doesn't love a treasure hunt?

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00:23:12,000 --> 00:23:15,000

And the myth of El Dorado has been going on for hundreds of years

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00:23:15,000 --> 00:23:23,000

and now we have these images that suggest there could be a lost golden city right there under the rainforest canopy.

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00:23:23,000 --> 00:23:29,000

Further aerial investigations have turned up geoglyphs and massive roads the size of highways.

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00:23:29,000 --> 00:23:34,000

All of this leads us to believe that Oriana was telling the truth about the cities that he saw.

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00:23:34,000 --> 00:23:38,000

Unfortunately, a full expedition proves too difficult.

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00:23:38,000 --> 00:23:44,000

The Amazon basin itself is enormous. It's more than 2.7 million square miles.

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00:23:44,000 --> 00:23:50,000

And about 2 million of those square miles have never really been explored or studied.

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00:23:50,000 --> 00:23:56,000

It's an area the size of India. There's a lot we still don't know about the interior of the Amazon.

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00:23:56,000 --> 00:24:05,000

It's just so overgrown and impenetrable. The access is difficult, the terrain is difficult, the weather conditions are difficult.

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00:24:05,000 --> 00:24:07,000

There's no way to get an equipment.

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00:24:07,000 --> 00:24:12,000

For now, aerial studies are our best bet for finding any answers.

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00:24:12,000 --> 00:24:19,000

So it seems that Oriana wasn't lying, that he was telling the truth, at least about the cities.

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00:24:19,000 --> 00:24:22,000

We can't be totally sure about the gold.

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00:24:26,000 --> 00:24:34,000

The lure of El Dorado, the lost city of gold, has captured the imagination of generations of treasure seekers.

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00:24:34,000 --> 00:24:47,000

But perhaps none are more renowned or more determined than a world-famous British explorer who takes on the search in the late 1500s.

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00:24:47,000 --> 00:24:53,000

In 1585, England and Spain are engaged in a long-running conflict.

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00:24:53,000 --> 00:24:57,000

So you've probably heard of the Spanish Armada.

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00:24:57,000 --> 00:25:04,000

That's just a part of a 19-year-long war called the Anglo-Spanish War.

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00:25:04,000 --> 00:25:12,000

While that war was fought officially between these two countries, there was also a very large amount of guerrilla warfare.

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00:25:12,000 --> 00:25:26,000

The English were sponsoring piracy, what they called privateers, sending ships out to basically attack the Spanish ships that were attempting the conquest of the New World.

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00:25:26,000 --> 00:25:35,000

One of the top English privateers is Sir Walter Raleigh, who's already famous as an explorer and a statesman, and he's a favorite of Queen Elizabeth I.

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00:25:35,000 --> 00:25:41,000

While he's off raiding Spanish ships, he hears a lot about what they've been up to in South America.

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00:25:42,000 --> 00:25:47,000

Including their search for El Dorado.

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00:25:47,000 --> 00:26:00,000

At some point in the 1590s, Raleigh hears the story of Juan Martinez, a conquistador who had

explored the Orinoco River area 20 years earlier in the 1570s.

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00:26:00,000 --> 00:26:07,000

According to Martinez, when his expedition fails, he's blindfolded by the natives and taken to a city of gold.

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00:26:07,000 --> 00:26:14,000

Raleigh speaks to other Spanish conquistadors and they tell him that the golden city he's looking for is called Manoa.

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00:26:14,000 --> 00:26:24,000

And they tell him that it is the imperial city of this region, which at the time is called Guyana.

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00:26:24,000 --> 00:26:32,000

It's located near a lake called Parime. It's supposedly a saltwater lake that's massive. It's 600 miles across.

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00:26:32,000 --> 00:26:43,000

Raleigh is told that the natives get all their gold from the lake itself, that it flows down the river and tumbles into the lake where they can find it.

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00:26:43,000 --> 00:26:51,000

In April 1595, Raleigh arrives in South America with four ships and 100 men.

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00:26:51,000 --> 00:26:59,000

So after landing near present-day Guyana, Raleigh and his men take five small boats up the Orinoco River.

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00:26:59,000 --> 00:27:06,000

It's a long and arduous process because they're going against the current and his men are not used to all this heat and humidity.

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00:27:06,000 --> 00:27:14,000

After a month, they've gone a little over 200 miles and they're exhausted, so they decide to pull off the river, take a break and recover.

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00:27:14,000 --> 00:27:25,000

When they come ashore, Raleigh and his compatriots make contact with a native tribe who's friendly to them and who's also adorned in gold.

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00:27:25,000 --> 00:27:31,000

At this point, there are literally just nuggets of gold lying on the banks of the river.

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00:27:31,000 --> 00:27:42,000

Raleigh ends up befriending the chief of this tribe. His name is Topiawari and he tells Raleigh of a giant lake full of gold just nearby.

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00:27:42,000 --> 00:27:48,000

And Raleigh, of course, assumes this must be Parime. This is the lake he's looking for.

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00:27:48,000 --> 00:27:54,000

Raleigh spends the next three months desperately searching for El Dorado.

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00:27:54,000 --> 00:28:08,000

All of his men are exhausted. They're in no condition to keep going, so he decides that he's going to turn back and when everyone is refreshed again, they will start over and they'll come back and find it.

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00:28:08,000 --> 00:28:17,000

When he arrives back in England at the end of August 1595, Raleigh expects a hero's welcome.

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00:28:17,000 --> 00:28:26,000

He's certain he'll be celebrated and will have no issues raising funds for a new expedition. But that's not what happens because he doesn't bring back any gold.

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00:28:26,000 --> 00:28:31,000

There's no return on investments and so nobody wants to fund another expedition.

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00:28:31,000 --> 00:28:36,000

Ultimately, Raleigh waits another 22 years.

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00:28:36,000 --> 00:28:42,000

Queen Elizabeth I dies on March 24th, 1603 and she was his main patron.

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00:28:42,000 --> 00:28:49,000

And so after her death, Raleigh decides to support a rival for the crown instead of the rightful heir, James I.

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00:28:49,000 --> 00:28:59,000

But James becomes king and Raleigh is immediately imprisoned in the Tower of London where he remains until 1616.

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00:28:59,000 --> 00:29:04,000

Even languishing in prison, Raleigh never gives up on his dream of finding El Dorado.

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00:29:04,000 --> 00:29:13,000

And in 1617, he's pardoned by King James and finally given permission for a second expedition to

South America under one condition.

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00:29:13,000 --> 00:29:19,000

The king knows how much Raleigh hates the Spanish, but there's finally peace between the two countries.

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00:29:19,000 --> 00:29:26,000

So he makes Raleigh promise that he's not going to do anything to disrupt this delicate truce that the countries have.

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00:29:26,000 --> 00:29:29,000

And reluctantly, Raleigh agrees.

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00:29:30,000 --> 00:29:34,000

Raleigh departs England for a second attempt in 1617.

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00:29:34,000 --> 00:29:38,000

This time, he brings along his son Watt.

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00:29:38,000 --> 00:29:48,000

When they reach the mouth of the Orinoco River this time, Raleigh, who's now an old man, sends his

son Watt to lead a search party while he stays back on board the ship.

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00:29:48,000 --> 00:29:53,000

Within days, his men did exactly what they were told not to do.

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00:29:53,000 --> 00:29:56,000

They went into Spanish territory and started a fight.

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00:29:57,000 --> 00:30:01,000

Watt Raleigh is shot through the neck with a musket and dies.

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00:30:01,000 --> 00:30:06,000

When the rest of the party returns to the ship, the second in command commits suicide.

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00:30:06,000 --> 00:30:14,000

Raleigh is distraught. Their mission is over. He's lost his son. He's disobeyed the king and he has no gold to show for it.

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00:30:14,000 --> 00:30:20,000

He decides to turn around and head back home, knowing full well the fate that he's about to face.

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00:30:20,000 --> 00:30:26,000

Upon his return to England, Sir Walter Raleigh is beheaded by order of King James I,

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00:30:26,000 --> 00:30:32,000

accused of deliberately inciting war between England and Spain.

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00:30:32,000 --> 00:30:39,000

It's another tragic end in the search for El Dorado. It seems to be a curse for anybody trying to find it.

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00:30:39,000 --> 00:30:42,000

And there's a further ironic twist.

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00:30:42,000 --> 00:30:48,000

Centuries later, in 1871, a gold mine is opened in El Caillau, Venezuela.

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00:30:48,000 --> 00:30:54,000

Very close to the location where Raleigh stopped with his men and met the natives adorned with gold.

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00:30:54,000 --> 00:30:58,000

It turns into one of the richest mines in the world at the time,

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00:30:58,000 --> 00:31:04,000

exporting more than a million ounces of gold in a 20-year period. The mine is still active today.

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00:31:04,000 --> 00:31:14,000

There is potentially \$2 trillion worth of materials in the ground right beneath where Raleigh and his company had stopped.

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00:31:14,000 --> 00:31:16,000

He just missed it.

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00:31:19,000 --> 00:31:26,000

Conquistador Gonzalo de Quezada spreads the story of El Dorado in 1537,

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00:31:26,000 --> 00:31:31,000

but his is not the first Spanish take on this legendary city.

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00:31:31,000 --> 00:31:36,000

In fact, 10 years earlier, a group of Spanish explorers have an incredible experience of their own.

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00:31:36,000 --> 00:31:41,000

It's a story so unbelievable that becomes famous throughout Spain.

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00:31:41,000 --> 00:31:49,000

In 1527, Conquistador Panfilo de Narváez departs for the new world with 600 men,

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00:31:49,000 --> 00:31:55,000

his mission to explore and colonize what is now the Gulf Coast of America.

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00:31:55,000 --> 00:32:01,000

Narváez visits and maps what are now Hispaniola, Cuba, and Florida.

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00:32:01,000 --> 00:32:05,000

But like many expeditions at the time, it had its struggles.

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00:32:05,000 --> 00:32:11,000

Narváez himself dies within the first year and ships and supplies are lost to hurricanes.

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00:32:11,000 --> 00:32:17,000

By 1532, only four of the original 600 men remain.

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00:32:17,000 --> 00:32:25,000

Eventually, they cross the Gulf of Mexico and land in what is now Texas, becoming the first Europeans to cross the Gulf.

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00:32:25,000 --> 00:32:33,000

They need to get back to a Spanish outpost, the closest being in Mexico, so they start walking through today's American Southwest.

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00:32:33,000 --> 00:32:40,000

After a few years in 1536, they're able to get back to Mexico City where they tell their tale of survival,

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00:32:40,000 --> 00:32:43,000

which is incredible in its own right.

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00:32:43,000 --> 00:32:50,000

But even more incredible is something they heard about along the way, seven different cities of gold.

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00:32:50,000 --> 00:32:55,000

And just as the Narváez crew comes back with their stories of cities of gold,

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00:32:55,000 --> 00:32:59,000

Quezada is hearing stories of a golden city in Colombia.

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00:32:59,000 --> 00:33:03,000

At this point, many of the Spanish begin to believe it's all connected.

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00:33:03,000 --> 00:33:05,000

There's not just one golden city.

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00:33:05,000 --> 00:33:11,000

There's a gold-rich civilization spread through the Americas with multiple golden cities.

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00:33:11,000 --> 00:33:14,000

And El Dorado is just one of them.

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00:33:17,000 --> 00:33:24,000

In 1539, Mexican governor Vasquez de Coronado decides to investigate.

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00:33:24,000 --> 00:33:33,000

Coronado sends up Franciscan friar, Marcos Daniza, and one of the original survivors from the first expedition to bring back evidence of the seven cities of gold.

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00:33:33,000 --> 00:33:42,000

When the friar returns five months later, he shares stories of a fantastical pueblo he calls Sibola.

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00:33:42,000 --> 00:33:48,000

It is just full of wealth, as though it is made of gold.

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00:33:48,000 --> 00:33:55,000

The area that the friar describes is in present-day New Mexico and the region of the Zuni people.

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00:33:55,000 --> 00:34:09,000

Coronado mounts an even larger expedition convinced that the Sibola, described by Marcos Daniza, is in fact El Dorado, one of the famous golden cities.

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00:34:09,000 --> 00:34:15,000

On April 22, 1540, Coronado's team departs from Culiacán.

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00:34:15,000 --> 00:34:20,000

Coronado dispatches 400 conquistadors and 2,000 indigenous peoples.

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00:34:20,000 --> 00:34:25,000

What they find is small outposts, dwellings that look like queblos.

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00:34:25,000 --> 00:34:31,000

There are seven cities in the area, but they're all very similar to the first.

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00:34:31,000 --> 00:34:34,000

They're very small, no evidence of gold.

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00:34:34,000 --> 00:34:39,000

It seems in fact that Coronado had been duped by the friar.

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00:34:40,000 --> 00:34:46,000

But Coronado is convinced the stories of El Dorado are still true.

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00:34:46,000 --> 00:34:53,000

The peoples of these pueblos tell Coronado that there are cities of gold, but they're farther to the north and they should keep marching.

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00:34:53,000 --> 00:35:02,000

And Coronado and his men, believing that they haven't reached it yet, keep marching for months and months and hundreds and hundreds of miles.

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00:35:02,000 --> 00:35:08,000

By 1541, they've journeyed as far north as modern Kansas.

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00:35:08,000 --> 00:35:15,000

They don't discover El Dorado, but they are the first Europeans to see the Colorado River and the Grand Canyon.

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00:35:15,000 --> 00:35:20,000

Coronado eventually returns to Mexico City in 1542.

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00:35:20,000 --> 00:35:28,000

It was a long, disastrous journey that did not result in finding a fantastic city of gold.

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00:35:28,000 --> 00:35:32,000

Coronado ends up bankrupt and dies a few years later.

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00:35:32,000 --> 00:35:38,000

Yet one more life ruined by the search for unending wealth.

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00:35:38,000 --> 00:35:48,000

What's ironic about all of this is that years later, those same small pueblos would turn out to be rich in ores like silver, copper and turquoise.

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00:35:48,000 --> 00:35:57,000

If the Spanish hadn't been so focused on finding the golden city of El Dorado, they might have discovered the riches that were there all along.

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00:36:02,000 --> 00:36:09,000

They have searched for the famed city of El Dorado for five centuries across both North and South America.

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00:36:09,000 --> 00:36:12,000

No one has found it.

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00:36:12,000 --> 00:36:19,000

There's certainly been no shortage of people looking for El Dorado, especially among the Spanish conquistadors.

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00:36:19,000 --> 00:36:28,000

And some theories suggest that there might be a pretty good reason for that, which is that El Dorado as a city was simply made up.

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00:36:32,000 --> 00:36:41,000

Based on the artifacts that we've found, we know that some indigenous communities in Central and South America used gold for decoration and religious purposes.

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00:36:41,000 --> 00:36:44,000

But that's it. That's all we know.

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00:36:44,000 --> 00:36:53,000

We have no proof of an actual golden city, apart from the fact that the Spanish were told stories about it and were obsessed with finding it.

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00:36:53,000 --> 00:37:00,000

So one school of thought is that the natives were telling Spanish the truth that there was a city

of gold. But what if they lied?

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00:37:00,000 --> 00:37:03,000

The indigenous people of the New World aren't stupid.

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00:37:03,000 --> 00:37:09,000

They were understandably confused by the Spanish desire for gold.

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00:37:09,000 --> 00:37:18,000

They did not value it in the same way that the Spanish did. They used it for decoration for religious purposes, but not for monetary value.

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00:37:18,000 --> 00:37:26,000

But they could clearly see the obsession that the conquistadors had with getting more gold.

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00:37:26,000 --> 00:37:33,000

The Spanish come in with threats and attacks. They'll do anything to get this gold, even kill for it.

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00:37:33,000 --> 00:37:39,000

Many South American historians believe this inspires the natives to lie.

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00:37:39,000 --> 00:37:48,000

When the Spanish come looking for gold, the indigenous people just want to survive. They want to get the Spanish out of there as fast as possible.

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00:37:48,000 --> 00:37:58,000

So they tell them, yes, there is the gold you're looking for. It's just over those mountains, just down that river, just on the other side of this forest.

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00:37:58,000 --> 00:38:05,000

And the Spanish take the bait every time and move on looking for that gold.

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00:38:05,000 --> 00:38:13,000

So one of the best examples of this is what happens to Coronado when he's marching through the southwestern desert looking for El Dorado.

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00:38:13,000 --> 00:38:20,000

Every Pueblo he stops at tells him that this city is a little more north until he ends up all the way up in Kansas.

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00:38:20,000 --> 00:38:24,000

It's not just the natives who benefit.

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00:38:24,000 --> 00:38:34,000

The Europeans use it to their own advantage. They embellish claims of El Dorado and its riches in order to attract crew and financial backing for their expeditions.

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00:38:34,000 --> 00:38:41,000

When Francisco de Oriana goes back to Spain, he has no gold to show for his efforts.

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00:38:41,000 --> 00:38:52,000

But what he does have is stories. And when he tells the king what he heard about the Golden City of El Dorado, it works.

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00:38:52,000 --> 00:38:55,000

He gets his next expedition funded.

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00:38:55,000 --> 00:38:59,000

There's one more convenient use for the El Dorado lie.

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00:38:59,000 --> 00:39:04,000

As the colonial conquest of South America ends, the Spanish have an issue.

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00:39:04,000 --> 00:39:09,000

They have hundreds, maybe thousands of conquistadors with nothing to do.

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00:39:09,000 --> 00:39:16,000

There's no one left to conquer. There's no more gold to steal. They're sitting around getting drunk, causing problems.

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00:39:16,000 --> 00:39:20,000

Until they're given a new purpose.

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00:39:20,000 --> 00:39:27,000

The actual Spanish government comes up with a plan to send these idle soldiers off on hunts to look for El Dorado.

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00:39:27,000 --> 00:39:31,000

Which by this point they assume will be wild goose chases.

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00:39:31,000 --> 00:39:40,000

Not only does it keep them occupied, but it gets them out of the cities and into the jungles for weeks, months, maybe even years with a chance that they won't come back.

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00:39:40,000 --> 00:39:46,000

At this point the search for El Dorado isn't about finding gold. It's actually about getting rid of problems.

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00:39:46,000 --> 00:39:51,000

One such documented expedition takes place in 1560.

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00:39:51,000 --> 00:40:01,000

That year, the Spanish send 300 conquistadors on a search for El Dorado, led by Pedro de Ursúa.

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00:40:01,000 --> 00:40:10,000

Ursúa is asked to bring along a particularly troublesome group of soldiers, led by Lope de Aguirre, to essentially get rid of him for a while.

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00:40:10,000 --> 00:40:18,000

Aguirre murders Ursúa and he and his soldiers go on a marauding expedition, leaving a trail of death and destruction.

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00:40:18,000 --> 00:40:31,000

Most of the 300 die along the way. It's an awful scene, but it also shows that the Spanish government by 1560, they no longer even believe that El Dorado exists or is worth looking for.

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00:40:31,000 --> 00:40:38,000

It's just a convenient way to get rid of troublemakers. Ursúa says so himself in his letters.

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00:40:38,000 --> 00:40:44,000

He was just trying to occupy Aguirre and these idle veterans, and he got himself killed in the process.

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00:40:45,000 --> 00:40:55,000

But thanks to the Spanish explorers and modern day excavations, we know that South America had, and still has, tons of gold.

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00:40:55,000 --> 00:41:00,000

It's just not all piled up in one city, like the stories said.

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00:41:00,000 --> 00:41:08,000

And in that sense, the legend is real. It's not like these stories are promising gold where none exists. It does.

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00:41:09,000 --> 00:41:13,000

And man's imagination and greed filled in the rest.

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00:41:16,000 --> 00:41:24,000

Archaeologists continue to search for lost ancient cities throughout South America and have found nearly a dozen in the past decade alone.

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00:41:24,000 --> 00:41:30,000

But none matches the allure of the tantalizing lost city of gold.

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00:41:30,000 --> 00:41:35,000

Perhaps one day, El Dorado will be finally uncovered.

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00:41:35,000 --> 00:41:41,000

I'm Lawrence Fishburne. Thank you for watching History's Greatest Mysteries.