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Tonight, a fortune worth hundreds of billions of dollars

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plundered by Japan during World War II.

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Artwork, priceless treasures,

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100 billion or more in gold and silver alone.

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Its whereabouts are still unknown and shrouded in mystery.

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The Philippines is 7,000-plus islands.

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You can't think of a better place to hide things.

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Now, we explore the top theories about this infamous missing treasure.

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The United States government would be very interested in finding out where this gold was.

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These aren't just treasure hunters. These are CIA agents.

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The Marcos' aren't really doing a great job of trying to hide the fact that they suddenly have a bunch of money.

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In retrospect, how did they get so rich? Nobody was asking that question.

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What really happened to the lost gold of World War II?

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The World War II

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It's the spring of 1942, just a few months after Pearl Harbor.

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War is raging in the Pacific.

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Japan's vast empire stretches from Manchuria through Southeast Asia,

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all the way to the Solomon Islands.

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And in every territory it conquers, Japanese forces seize a fortune.

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The Japanese are actually meticulous in their ability to extract wealth.

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And they do so at every level.

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So not only will they go after things like national banks and depositories of gold bullion and silver bars,

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but they will also raid individual houses to amass enormous stockpiles of jewelry and other symbols of wealth and value.

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Think about the entire national treasure of 13 countries.

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This is a lot of value, a lot of money.

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The value of what's estimated that the Japanese looted is between 60 and 100 billion dollars in 1945 dollars.

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You know what that translates to? Between 3 and 5 trillion dollars today.

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In March of 1942, Japan has another conquest in its sights, the US territory of the Philippines.

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The Japanese are going to very quickly sweep south toward the capital of Manila.

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There they're going to run into elements of the United States Army that's been in place under Douglas MacArthur to try to halt their advance.

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But before that happens, MacArthur and his headquarters team are ordered by President Roosevelt to withdraw from the Philippines.

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So the Philippines will fall in 1942 and MacArthur will have to evacuate.

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So he will leave the Philippines, he makes his sort of famous promise, I will return, I will be back to help you against the Japanese.

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In some ways the Philippines is the perfect place for the Japanese to amass a lot of the loot that they're pulling off of the mainland of Asia.

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And that's because the Philippines is an island location, it's a very easy transshipment point.

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There's a lot of great ports and harbors and there's no possibility of an enemy overrunning any of those storage depots.

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And so what they're going to do is they're going to consolidate the material that they're stealing in a few specific locations and then they're going to transship it directly back to Japan.

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But by early 1943, a US submarine blockade has cut off the sea routes back to Japan's home islands.

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The Japanese hold on to the Philippines for now.

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There's still this hope among the Japanese that the Philippines will be one of the last things that will kind of fall, that they will continue to be able to control that at least.

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By late 1944, the tides of war are turning. MacArthur makes good on his promise to return to the Philippines, arriving with 200,000 troops.

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His opponent, the notorious Japanese general Tomoyuki Yamashita.

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Yamashita is one of the great troubleshooters of the Japanese army. He's widely perceived as one of its greatest field commanders.

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His job is to both enhance the defenses and make it as costly as possible for any potential American invasion.

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They called him the Tiger of Malaya, what a great name, from his victory in Malaya.

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And what better a man to lead the defense of the Philippines than him?

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According to some, fighting off the Allies wasn't Yamashita's only mission.

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Some historians do suggest that it wasn't just winning the war or staying and keeping hold of the Philippines, it was also what to do with all of this wealth that he had accumulated.

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If they're going to lose the Philippines, they have to hide this treasure somewhere where they can come back in the future for it.

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The following summer, after the US drops two atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Emperor Hirohito finally surrenders on August 15th, 1945.

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But Yamashita and his army take another 17 days to surrender, holding out in the mountains of northern Luzon, leading some to ask, what were they doing during that time?

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According to Sterling Segraven, author who's an expert in this field, General Yamashita was working in Kahootz with an organization called the Golden Lily, who was in the Golden Lily.

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Military strategists, economic experts, members of the Japanese royal family, they had the job to find, take, and use, and ultimately hide, all of this treasure.

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So in 1943, tons of gold and treasure piling up in Manila and Emperor Hirohito hires his brother, Prince Chichibu, to head the Golden Lily and to spearhead the operation of securing the treasure.

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The Philippines is 7,000 plus islands. You can't think of a better place to hide things. Prince Chichibu arranged this group to create locations to place these hundred and five tunnels.

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And you can't do this alone. You need thousands of laborers and the Japanese had plenty of them.

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They would build these tunnels with Allied forces. They would use American and Allied POWs, and they would use enslaved Filipinos to construct these tunnels.

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They were really complex. So they weren't just a tunnel underground. They were just massive. There were all kinds of little kind of secret ways and a lot of things designed to throw off anyone who might go underground, who might discover the tunnels.

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The defensive aspects of Japanese tunnels included booby traps, and these could take the form of physical traps, so pits with spikes at the bottom of them, chemical weapon attacks, fragile containers full of cyanide.

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They even used the water tables so that when people would come in, the water tables could rise and the people in the caves would drown.

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Likely, the last 17 days, they would seal these entrances with concrete and then they'd let the jungle take over.

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The story of buried treasure sounds like the stuff of myth, but there's at least one witness who says he survived the destruction of one treasure tunnel.

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Decades later, a Filipino civilian, Ben Valmorez, came forward claimed he had information.

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As a kid at 14, he was hired to be the valet for Prince Taketa.

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So Valmorez claims he was there when this massive tunnel was built. That was 225 feet below the ground.

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And Yamashita says they wanted to have a party to celebrate the construction of this massive tunnel, and he tells all the engineers to go inside the tunnel.

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At that time, Prince Taketa calls Valmorez out. He says, no, you're my valet. Come out. You don't get to go to the party.

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They blow this thing up.

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Everyone dies inside, so Prince Taketa saves Valmorez, who is the witness to watching the Japanese kill their own engineers again to keep everything silent.

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The Japanese were really interested in secrecy. They wanted to preserve what they had done, making it off-limits, knowledge-wise, to the allies.

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Anybody who knew about this gold was gone.

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According to Seagrave, the loop is so cleverly hidden, gold and lily members will need maps to find it again.

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Maps were produced in blue for the engineers who actually designed the various vaults throughout the Philippines,

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and then maps were designed in red to tell people how to find the treasure.

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And these maps would have flags that pointed in one direction if they were to be read in a mirror, and in the other direction if they were to be read normally.

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So even if you can read this map and you can find where the vault is, you could have the map upside down. You could have the map backwards, and realize that you go the wrong place, you can die.

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The cartographers supposedly draw up several copies of the maps, which go only to the highest ranking members of the Golden Lily.

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The Golden Lily was really counting on keeping the Philippines for the peace talks to allow them to go back and get the treasure to refund the imperialist army.

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They didn't get that. So Japan has to keep not only the treasure in the Philippines now because

they can't transport it, they've got to keep it secret.

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But did Yamashita and his soldiers really hide billions in gold?

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There are lots of maps to this gold in the Philippines that start cropping up. Why? Because everybody wants to go hunting for treasure. The question is, are these maps real?

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Ben Valmorez claims that as Prince Takeda prepared to leave Japan, he approached him and gave him a satchel that included maps to 175 different treasure sites throughout the Philippines.

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Takeda was on a submarine fleeing, and in case the submarines sunk, he wanted someone to know where the gold was.

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So Prince Takeda goes back, he instructs Valmorez to bury these maps, these 40 maps, and he does. He buries them in his backyard.

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Keep in mind that Prince Takeda saved his life when that tunnel was exploded, he called him out of there, and so maybe there's a sense of duty on Valmorez's part.

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It's sort of weird. You think if he got these maps from Takeda that maybe he would have gone and dug one up and gone and gotten some gold and lived an immensely luxurious life? No.

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Despite allegedly being in possession of so many of the gold and lilies' maps, Valmorez never seems to profit from them.

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Publicly Valmorez never found anything, never became a rich man.

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But think about it for a second. If you have a map and you find treasure, are you going to tell anyone? I wouldn't.

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The Pacific War

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It's the fall of 1945. The Pacific War is over, but the U.S. maintains a strong military presence in the Philippines.

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America's prime mission is to rebuild the country and provide relief for its suffering people. But there are also whispers of hidden gold.

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Think about this. Estimates are that the value of just the gold between 60 and a billion dollars in 1945 money, that's between three and five trillion dollars today.

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It's a pretty history-altering amount of wealth if it does exist, and it wouldn't just be Japan that would want it. It might be other nations who might be interested in getting it as well.

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According to Sump, President Truman is briefed on the gold and lily hordes and orders the fortune to be found, then seized.

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There starts to be rumors that again, soldiers, American soldiers, know of perhaps former Japanese soldiers or people who knew Japanese soldiers who had heard about Yamashita's wealth, and they know someone who knows where to look for it.

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According to this theory, Japanese officers looking for leniency begin sharing information about the golden lily's top secret operation. That doesn't mean they know exactly where the treasure-filled tunnels are, but apparently there's one prisoner who might.

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The person that has the information, the most information is Yamashita, who they have in custody. He is in prison in Manila. How do you get that information from him? You can't torture him. It's a war crime.

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The U.S. is trying to think what they can do to get this information. Yamashita will never give it up, because in his eyes, this is the future of Japan.

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But Yamashita's driver, Major Kojima Kashi, is a much easier target.

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Yamashita's driver finds himself in a small dark cell being interviewed by a couple of OSS operatives. The precursor to the CIA, it wasn't a good day for him.

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According to Seagraves, notorious American spook Edward Lansdale and Filipino national by the name

of Santa Romana, who is referred to generally as Santy, were the people who were involved in the torture of Yamashita's driver.

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So the driver cracks. Big surprise. What's he do? He leads Santy and Lansdale to a dozen or so of the more easily accessible treasure troves. What do they find? Gold bars, platinum bars, diamonds, gold buddhas. They not literally, but figuratively find Fort Knox.

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While Santy and his team are supposedly breaking open more vaults, Lansdale flies to Washington to brief President Truman about the find.

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Truman consults with his cabinet and makes a really pivotal decision. He says like, we're going to keep this. We're going to keep all of this, but we've got to keep it under wraps.

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You're looking ahead to a Cold War that the U.S. is going to be engaged in and the fear of communist domination was at a fever pitch.

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Pragmatic approach is to say we have access to these funds we can keep off the books to advance U.S. democratic interests around the world. And why would we give that up?

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To use this wealth, you have to keep it a secret. What does that mean? It means silencing Yamashita.

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On October 29, 1945, an American military tribunal in Manila begins presenting its case against General Yamashita for war crimes relating to his campaign in the Philippines. It's a controversial move.

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So you think about how long these tribunals usually take? You think about like the Nazis that were brought up on trial. It takes a long time. Sometimes it takes decades. Yamashita's trial is run through very, very fast.

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Yamashita, once Japan's outstanding general, takes the stand. Before him, witnesses have presented harrowing evidence of atrocities committed under his command.

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The big question is what Yamashita guilty of? Yes, he was a Japanese general, but he is not on record ordering the death of, for example, American POWs.

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Yamashita himself says he was not aware of half the stuff he was charged with. In his position and with a number of troops he oversaw, he couldn't have been.

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On December 7, 1945, the four-year anniversary of Pearl Harbor, they deliver their verdict.

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The commission finds you guilty as charged and sentences you to death by hanging.

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Yamashita is really the first commander to be held responsible for things that his men commit without him knowing it. And that feeds into this idea of why the execution. Well, if the government does want the money, you want to keep him quiet. And that's how and why he is executed.

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The notorious general is hanged on February 23, 1946. Whatever secrets he's hiding about buried gold, go to his grave with him.

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What happens to the wealth that supposedly, as historians claim, was collected by the United States government? Well, it has to go somewhere. And that's this secret banking society, this secret wealth container system, the Black Eagle Trust.

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And according to the Seagraves, this is a trust which now houses all the funds of the loot seized from Yamashita, but also all the loot seized from the Nazis.

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And it wasn't until decades later that a former deputy director of the CIA, Ray Klein, admits to the Seagraves that this money was put into 176 different banks spanning 42 countries.

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Now, a lot of historians will sort of question that, was there really a Black Eagle Trust? Is this a conspiracy theory? But the reality is that when Santi Santo Romano died, he left hundreds of millions of dollars.

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Some historians say it was because he had access to the looted Yamashita gold for his role that he was able to play in uncovering it. If you want to question this theory or think about how truthful this is, one question would be, well, why does the United States care about keeping this secret?

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One explanation could be all of the logistic trouble that we would have to go through in admitting that this stuff came from victims of war.

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This is the fruit of the poison tree. I didn't steal the money, but it's stolen money. You're responsible and you're accountable. So that's why the U.S. government would probably want to keep

the existence of these billions and billions and billions of dollars a state secret.

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It begs a very tantalizing question. If the U.S. government got their hand on billions of dollars from 12 sites, what happened to the other 163? So what does that mean?

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Billions of dollars today, trillions of dollars could be sitting hidden in caves throughout the Philippines, waiting to be discovered.

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Decades after the war, one of the most infamous dictators in world history in the 20th century, he becomes part of the story.

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It's 1986 and the eyes of the world are on the Philippines. As notorious dictator, Ferdinand Marcos is overthrown in a popular uprising.

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There's a lot of complaints living under a dictator, but living under the Marcos' has a very specific complaint. While the Filipinos are living in abject poverty, Ferdinand Marcos and his wife, they're living in the lap of luxury.

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I vividly remember being a kid in the 1980s and reading about these million-dollar shoe shopping sprees that emerald Marcos went on.

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The Marcos aren't just rich. They're significantly wealthier than most of the country. And the way they spend money is in complete contrast to the way that most Filipinos are living after World War II in the Philippines.

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There's one story that they went to Rome on vacation and on the way back. They had to turn the plane around because emerald Marcos had forgotten that she wanted to buy a particular kind of cheese.

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The Marcos aren't really doing a great job of trying to hide the fact that they suddenly have a bunch of money. The only question that comes, where's that money coming from? It's obviously not from his government salary.

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There are accusations that Marcos and his cronies embezzled upwards of \$10 billion from the Philippines' treasury. But is there more to this story? Could their wealth in fact come from another source?

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So if the Marcos are in charge of the Philippines, then they have such vast power in the Philippines, one explanation could be while the Marcos are drawing from Yamashita's gold.

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If that's the case, it all begs the question, how did the Marcos' get their hands on Yamashita's gold?

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The Marcos chapter of the Lost Gold Saga really begins in 1961 with the 17-year-old boy named Rogelio Roger Rojas.

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Enter Rogelio Rojas, who is born towards the end of the war in the Philippines. Keep in mind the Philippines is an impoverished country. Rojas is born into poverty. He's also born into the legend of this gold.

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He meets this Japanese man who claims to know from a Japanese soldier where Yamashita's gold is located. So he claims to know of a site of one of these tunnels. He has a map and he knows where it is.

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If he's interpreting this map correctly, it says that one of the golden-deadly vaults is actually very close to his hometown of Bajo, in fact, right by the hospital.

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Rogelio Rojas thinks he's actually on to something.

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In early 1970, Rogelio gets a permit from a local judge to begin excavation. That judge's name is P.O. Marcos.

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Rogelio Rojas didn't really make the connection, but the judge that grants the excavating permit to Rogelio is actually connected to the Marcos family.

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So he is part of this vast network of Marcos. It connects Rojas to Marcos and to Yamashita's gold. So now Yamashita's gold is part of the Marcos story.

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In May of 1970, Rojas and his team start hacking away through dense vegetation near the hospital.

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So after two months, they find a cave. All the bad news is, about 100 yards inside the cave, it's caved in and it appears to have been dynamite at shut.

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What does that mean? They're going to have to tunnel around it.

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Weeks go by. The men are running out of money.

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Treasure hunting, it's like gambling. You're sitting at a roulette wheel and you just can't get up. It's that last spaded dirt. It's that last pass with the metal detector and that's like Rojas.

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They're about to quit. Rojas decides to give it one last look with his metal detector and he can't. The metal detector senses something.

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Full of adrenaline start digging and digging. They break through. They find, you know, a whole chamber underneath them.

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They look down. What do they see inside? 28 inch tall, golden Buddha, Burmese style. They fit the jackpot.

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The thing weighs a ton. It's only this big. They get it up and they bring it back and he stores it in his closet because they want to get back to excavating and digging more.

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That's when Rojas claims to have found another chamber crammed with wooden boxes from floor to ceiling.

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It opens one of the boxes inside gold bars. And if Rojas is telling the truth, this is a massive quantity of treasure. It's a mind blowing experience. It's like something out of an Indiana Jones movie.

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This is too much gold to move in a day. They're going to go home, sell the Buddha and use the money to hire more workers and get more personnel, go back open the cave and get the rest of the gold.

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And Rojas, of course, wants to celebrate. He has his brother take a picture of him next to the Buddha.

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We've got this picture of the one thing of Rojas with this golden Buddha and a prospective buyer

comes and looks at it, tests the gold and finds it is actually 22 karat.

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The mysterious buyer offers Rojas \$160,000 for the Buddha. Rojas says he'll think about it.

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00:23:46,000 --> 00:23:54,000

As he's thinking about it, he's looking at this Buddha and he notices what just imperceptibly looks like a fine liner on the neck of the Buddha.

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00:23:55,000 --> 00:24:06,000

So he takes this and he looks at it and he starts to strike. It takes a freaking wooden stick and he starts hitting this thing until it comes loose, removes the head and inside are handfuls of diamonds. Cut and uncut.

162

00:24:07,000 --> 00:24:23,000

Is all that glitters in the Philippines really gold? More than 20 years after the Japanese Imperial Army surrenders the islands, Rojilo Rojas digs up what appears to be part of Yamashita's legendary treasure.

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00:24:24,000 --> 00:24:31,000

But just as Rojas is celebrating his find, the tale of the lost gold takes another dramatic twist.

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00:24:32,000 --> 00:24:46,000

April 5th, 1971, 2.30 a.m. there's a knock at the door. Bad thing in the Philippines opens the door. It's the police. They come in, they arrest Rojas, they seize the statue, they later put him in jail.

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00:24:47,000 --> 00:24:57,000

But guess who was there? The buyer. And Rojas knows what's going on. Why? Because on the rifles there are these little red ribbons. And that means palace guard, Ferdinand Marcos. He knows who's behind this.

166

00:25:01,000 --> 00:25:15,000

And if you go back and realize that the permit originally came from Pio Marcos, who was related to Ferdinand Marcos, and then Kladata and you realize that's where the information came, then Marcos probably sent that buyer to make sure it was legit. Then the palace guards come and confiscate and arrest him.

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00:25:16,000 --> 00:25:25,000

Outraged, Rojas goes to the police and the media with his story. It's not long before the word spreads of his treatment by Marcos.

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

When the Buddha is stolen from him, this is really heartbreaking. Again, it's not just about the money, but what it meant to him and what it meant for being able to continue to search for the truth.

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00:25:36,000 --> 00:25:47,000

Everyone knows about Rojas and this Buddha, and so there's this enormous public outcry when this happens, because he's sort of a folk hero. And Marcos decides to return the Buddha. But the Buddha that's returned isn't the same Buddha.

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00:25:47,000 --> 00:25:55,000

Buddha that's returned isn't made of gold, it's made of bronze, the head is stuck on. It's just not the same Buddha. They give us like copycat Buddha to try to appease the public.

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00:25:56,000 --> 00:26:01,000

When Rojas speaks out, he's arrested and spends the next two years in jail.

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00:26:02,000 --> 00:26:16,000

The guards then torture Rojas and all of his teammates. Rojas supposedly never breaks, which makes sense, being that driven as a treasure hunter. You're not going to break. That's your life's goal. But apparently one of his team breaks and gives up the location.

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00:26:17,000 --> 00:26:27,000

After Rojas is released from prison on November 19, 1974, he finds soldiers standing outside tents near the Baguio General Hospital.

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And the hospital staff later actually remembers seeing, and they've reported, seeing soldiers come out of the cave behind the hospital carrying wooden crates and putting them in military trucks.

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00:26:37,000 --> 00:26:45,000

They didn't have to guess what was inside, because some of these boxes, they were rotten and they broke up when they were being carried. And what falls out? Gold bars the sides of cigarette boxes.

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00:26:45,000 --> 00:26:52,000

To give you an extent of how much gold we're talking about, it's 10 boxes a day going up every day for a year.

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00:26:53,000 --> 00:27:02,000

Rojas is certain Marcos' soldiers have found his tunnel and stolen his treasure, but there's nothing he can do. At least, not for now.

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00:27:03,000 --> 00:27:09,000

Meanwhile, Burden and Marcos is on the hunt for even more golden lily vaults.

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00:27:09,000 --> 00:27:17,000

Fast forward not long after this, Marcos allegedly gets his hand on something else, not more treasure, but a full set of golden lily maps.

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00:27:18,000 --> 00:27:23,000

So remember those maps that Delmorez had 10, 15 years ago? Maybe the same maps.

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00:27:24,000 --> 00:27:33,000

Allegedly, Marcos uses these maps to successfully excavate five more tunnel complexes piled high with dizzying amounts of gold and jewels.

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Burden and Anamelda constantly spend money and they do it with wild abandon. If it is connected to this horde, well that goes back to this idea of whose money are they actually spending.

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00:27:46,000 --> 00:27:54,000

They're not spending just Japanese captured goods, they're spending goods that belong to all different people across the Pacific.

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00:27:55,000 --> 00:28:01,000

So if Marcos is going to make this work, he's got to make this gold appear like it didn't come from the Japanese, stolen from other countries.

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00:28:01,000 --> 00:28:06,000

So Marcos hires a mining expert and a metal artist named Robert Curtis.

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00:28:10,000 --> 00:28:26,000

The theory is that one of the things that Robert Curtis was able to do for Marcos is to doctor the gold or make it seem through playing around with the properties that it did actually come from the Philippines and didn't come from someplace else and wasn't captured and brought to the Philippines.

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But in 1986, Marcos' plans changed when over a million Filipinos take to the streets to protest his corrupt regime.

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00:28:37,000 --> 00:28:52,000

On February 26, 1986, the Marcos family flees the Philippines under cover of darkness and, having been granted asylum by President Reagan, take up a life of exile in Honolulu, Hawaii.

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00:28:52,000 --> 00:29:05,000

When the Marcos flee, they leave behind a lot of mystery. There's a lot of questions about what happened to the rest of Yamashita's horde, is it still there? And that's something that fuels Rojas.

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00:29:06,000 --> 00:29:19,000

Rojas is trying to figure out what he can do. He's not going to get the gold back. He decides to turn to the law and he files a civil suit in Hawaii against the Marcos. And the suit goes to the courts for years and years and years. It takes forever.

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Meanwhile, Rojas' lawsuit against the Marcos takes another turn.

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The suit's still going on. Rojas dies in a fairly suspicious manner.

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The official cause of death is tuberculosis. But there are questions about how is it that he died.

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According to his family, he never had any signs of symptoms of tuberculosis.

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But despite his death, Rojas has one trump card still left to play. In 1993, the court hears Bob Curtis' sworn testimony.

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00:29:52,000 --> 00:29:57,000

If you raise your hand to be strong, you sound less worthy of the testimony you're about to give in this cause. Will we get you to stop your bad?

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00:29:58,000 --> 00:30:02,000

I do. Your name again on the record, please. Robert H. Curtis.

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00:30:02,000 --> 00:30:15,000

Bob Curtis claims he was hired by Marcos to launder Yamashita's gold. He testifies to seeing

another item in Marcos' possession, a solid gold Buddha, with a removable head.

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00:30:16,000 --> 00:30:23,000

The very same golden Buddha Rojas is photographed with. Curtis' testimony helps the court to come to a final decision.

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In 1996, the court awards the Rojas' estate damages of \$22 billion, the largest civil settlement in history.

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\$20 billion is a lot of money. This was what the treasure was worth from that one vault that you found. There were 175 vaults.

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But even more important from a history perspective, it's not about the money. It's that a court of law actually validated that the existence of these vaults, that these things were real, that you were not just a robber.

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Yamashita did bury these, and that this legend is actually based in fact.

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It was a hard fought victory for the Rojas family, but a largely symbolic one.

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Despite Bob Curtis' testimony, the Marcos fortune is still caught up in legal wrangling. The Rojas family has yet to see a penny, and the mystery of Japan's lost gold still lingers.

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Now this just gives even more sort of proof if you subscribe to this theory of Yamashita's work, that there's more to be discovered.

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So, Jack is a retiree and an amateur fortune hunter. That's what he says. In the U.S. Embassy, they back up his claim. They paint him to the local media just a hobbyist.

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00:31:52,000 --> 00:31:59,000

But no one believes this because in addition to being a rabid anti-communist, he also has a very strong belief that the Rojas' wealth is not only in the U.S. and in the U.S.

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00:31:59,000 --> 00:32:09,000

So Jack is a retiree and an amateur fortune hunter. That's what he says. In the U.S. Embassy, they back up his claim. They paint him to the local media just a hobbyist.

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00:32:10,000 --> 00:32:17,000

But no one believes this because in addition to being a rabid anti-communist, he also happens to be one of the founders of the CIA.

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00:32:18,000 --> 00:32:28,000

Jack Singla forms his own treasure hunting organization that he calls Nipon Star. And his objective is to go to the Philippines and potentially take advantage of information he already knew.

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And he's also interested in the information about these possible treasure troves. One of his associates, Alan Foringer, he's the acting CIA head at the Embassy in Manila.

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And so, there's this idea that these aren't just treasure hunters. These are CIA agents operating as part of a deeper, darker, or more secret mission.

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According to this theory, Jack Singla decides Nipon Star needs to recruit someone with proven insider information.

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All they need to know is where to dig and who has that information. They know one guy who's got it, Bob Curtis.

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Bob Curtis is the metallurgist that worked with Ferdinand Marcos essentially to not only decode Japanese maps that were in Marcos's possession, but also then to effectively money launder any loot that was discovered.

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Bob Curtis saw himself as an American patriot. And according to one version of the story, President Reagan himself had endorsed Singla's efforts to recover stolen loot that the Japanese had hidden in the Philippines.

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With all their expertise and alleged deep pockets, Jack Singla's team should be well placed to find Yamashita's gold. But their search for the treasure doesn't go to plan.

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Publicly, Nipon Star is an abject failure throughout the 1980s. There are a whole host of media stories about their efforts to uncover buried treasure and their failures to be successful in those endeavors.

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Is it possible that they actually recovered treasure and put out a cover story that suggested that they'd been a failure? Of course.

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Curtis claims he was inspired to give his all towards these treasure hunting efforts because any treasure recovered might be used as a private funding source for defense and intelligence initiatives on behalf of the United States.

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As Foringer wrote in a letter to Curtis, those initiatives included the private funding of defense projects like the B-1 bomber, MX missile, and Ronald Reagan's Star Wars program.

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He appears to have been convinced that these private funding sources might create so-called black budget programs that would protect the United States from Soviet aggression.

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This money, if they find the golden lily treasure, is going to be used to establish a new arch-conservative military-industrial complex controlled by the United States.

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But by 1990, the pressure is growing on Nipon Star, and there are rumors of Soviet agents listening in on their communications.

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While Foringer is vacationing in Hawaii's at the beach and a pastor by walks by and something nicks his leg, within a day he's in the hospital suffering from mysterious ailments, and although he pulls through,

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after returning to his apartment in the Philippines, the usually healthy 37-year-old begins having seizures and his heart gives out and he dies under mysterious circumstances.

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You gotta ask, was Foringer's work with Nipon Star, is there a connection to his death? You gotta ask the question, maybe that put a target on his back.

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Despite Foringer's death, no gold is ever officially found by Nipon Star.

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Conspiracy theories love unexplained deaths, particularly to individuals that are getting close to the answers, and will often link those deaths together to suggest they're part of a bigger pattern.

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Offentimes humans die for unknown causes. Sometimes it really is just an accident.

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Since the end of World War II, the legend of Japan's lost gold has captured the imagination of treasure hunters worldwide.

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But as the decades have passed without new discoveries, some question if the treasure ever existed, and if yes, will more ever be found?

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00:36:23,000 --> 00:36:37,000

We don't know if we've got one great photo of Rojas with that Buddha. And after 80 plus years of searching for that treasure, that is the only real proof that we have.

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Like a lot of theories, there are certain key points that you can see, or that you know are real. And so with Yamashita's hoard, we certainly know that the Japanese plundered.

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00:36:52,000 --> 00:37:02,000

They stole tens of billions of dollars. The Japanese conquered the Pacific. They plundered like there was no tomorrow. They brought the wealth back to the Philippines.

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00:37:03,000 --> 00:37:11,000

There certainly was looting in the Philippines, just like there was looting by the Japanese in really anywhere that they went. That is a fact.

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00:37:12,000 --> 00:37:18,000

But there's no photos of vaults. There's no records of how much gold was brought into Manila.

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00:37:18,000 --> 00:37:27,000

Probably the diamond filled Buddha is a spoil of the Japanese looting. But maybe it's more of a one off than the tip of the iceberg.

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Maybe this was just one tunnel that was filled and we found it. And maybe there isn't this vast network that was part of the Golden Lily.

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Some also point to logistical concerns around Yamashita's last days during World War II to question the extent of the legendary treasure he supposedly buried.

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If you think about just how much gold was purported to have existed, how heavy and how much it was, the logistical requirements to move that kind of wealth would have been not only one of their main tasks, it would have been the only thing that they could do.

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00:38:04,000 --> 00:38:16,000

I think one of the real treasures in the Philippines is the millions of dollars spent on the local economy, fortune hunting and treasure hunting.

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Treasure hunters are drawn to the Philippines and the Philippines, from my experience, seem quite easy to embrace them.

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Comfortable embracing them and trying to send them to these sites. And again, I think it's from what I've seen, it's people who really believe that you can find these things buried on the island.

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A lot of these legends that sort of become folklore that stay because they become part of our history and part of our culture and the Filipino people are immensely proud people.

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00:38:47,000 --> 00:38:53,000

And in many ways they're very, very attached to this idea that this could exist and it could be here. So it in many ways lives because of the people themselves.

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00:38:54,000 --> 00:38:59,000

In the Philippines jungle, it's a story that never dies. Just when you think it's over, it comes right back to life.

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00:39:00,000 --> 00:39:15,000

Over the course of one weekend in 2017, a video is uploaded to YouTube. It quickly gains hundreds of thousands of views. In a submerged cave in the Philippines, what appears to be gold bars.

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00:39:15,000 --> 00:39:23,000

They were really dirty and muddy, but it became this internet sensation where people found them. All of a sudden the Yamashita's gold legend comes back. Maybe this is really happening.

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It stokes the fire again and makes that legend continue.

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00:39:28,000 --> 00:39:36,000

Is there a connection to Yamashita's gold? Maybe. And a lot of viewers like me, they remain skeptical. Maybe they just want views. It definitely warrants further investigation.

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00:39:36,000 --> 00:39:46,000

Now you have a lot of amateur treasure hunters who can upload videos. They can upload what they claim is proof of what they found and going back to Rojas and his Buddha statue.

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00:39:47,000 --> 00:39:59,000

That's something that people can see and when you can see something, it makes it a little bit more real. The fact that it does still spark interest, I think is something that it's still creating the conversation.

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00:40:00,000 --> 00:40:02,000

And as long as there's a conversation around it, it'll never die.

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00:40:03,000 --> 00:40:12,000

I have no doubt that treasure went into the ground. What I believe today is that whatever is left there is going to be incredibly hard to find.

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00:40:13,000 --> 00:40:22,000

And based upon the stories that we know about the way that these places are booby-trapped and trying to see this treasure would be incredibly dangerous.

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00:40:23,000 --> 00:40:28,000

And you know, I mean a billion dollars worth of gold would be really nifty to have. But it's also nice to be alive.

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We never run out of treasure hunters. People never stop dreaming for being the one person that's going to find this thing.

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To be the next Rojas, to find that next Buddha and to pop open the head and find diamonds, every treasure hunter wants that. And so that legend's never going to diminish.

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00:40:48,000 --> 00:40:54,000

For 80 years, the lure of Japan's lost gold has mesmerized world leaders and commoners alike.

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00:40:55,000 --> 00:41:01,000

We won't know the full truth about this legendary treasure until someone finally strikes gold.

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00:41:02,000 --> 00:41:10,000

But with such a dazzling fortune still on the line, there is one certainty. No one's laying down their treasure maps anytime soon.

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00:41:11,000 --> 00:41:16,000

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