

## **Midnight Empire: Age of Exploration**

This story is the sequel of *The Midnight Revolution*. It is recommended to read that story before you read this one, because then it will be easier to understand the story.

### **Chapter 1: Flashfire**

Many years had passed since the Midnight and Poisoner Empires defeated the Pilliager Empire. When they worked together, they outnumbered the Pilliagers and defeating them was easy. However, a large chunk of their territory was still not explored, and the Pilliager citizens, who had all been captured or killed, refused to reveal anything about what was there. Since most of the Pilliager territory was desert, there were frequent sandstorms, and every army that was sent out to explore this chunk of territory was always forced to come back because of them.

All of the Pilliager towns and cities had been split between the two empires though. All of the Pilliager cities had been renamed and Poisoner and Midnight citizens were slowly moving to them, but most of the people in these cities were Pilliagers. They were allowed to stay there and live their normal lives, but they were officially prisoners of war so they weren't allowed to leave the cities they were currently in. The Pilliagers could become Poisoner or Midnight Empire citizens by taking a five year course that introduced them to the respective empires' rules and culture. During these five years, the Pilliagers were supervised by soldiers of the respective empires, but slowly gained more freedom. By the end of the five year course, they could live just like normal citizens. Most of the Pilliagers eventually took these

courses, but some of them insisted that they were still loyal to Emperor Ryan, even though he had been captured and was now locked in a prison in Colourpest. These Pilliagers called themselves Flashfire and become terrorists and occasionally raided or captured cities. Most of the cities they attacked originally belonged to the Pilliager Empire, but they sometimes attacked other cities as well. The Twin Daggers, the main army of the Midnight Empire, and Lights Out, the Midnight Empire reserve forces, were often busy fighting Flashfire.

Meanwhile, the Shadow Guard had to defend the rest of the Midnight Empire all by themselves. Since there were no wars at the moment, this wasn't a very big job, but sometimes there were small rebellions or disputes that had to be sorted out.

Emperor Peter had revealed some more information about the Poisoner Empire. He said that it had three armies as well. Their main army was the Venom Army, they had a force called the Poison Police that was used for defense and their reserve army was called the Acido Corps, named after Adam Acido, one of the Poisoner Empire embassadors. The Acido Corps and Venom Army had also been busy fighting Flashfire. The two empires hoped to completely destroy this terrorist group, but they were recruiting new members every day and were good at hiding.

Emperor Larry, the emperor of the Midnight Empire, was in his throne room in the city of Moone one day, looking at a map of the two empires and frowning. He put red counters

on all of the locations where Flashfire had struck, and was trying to work out if they had a pattern or not, what their goal was, and most importantly, if there was a way to trap or ambush them. If he could predict where they would next strike, he could send the Twin Daggers there and kill or capture most of the Flashfire Torchers.

Unlike Emperor Shade, Emperor Larry did not like killing opponents that much, but he didn't insist on capturing them like Emperor Peter either. He instructed his armies to capture opponents where possible, but to kill opponents if it would give them a much higher chance of winning.

Anyway, he continued to look at the map, but the Flashfire attacks seemed to be random. After all, what did he expect? They were Pillagers after all, they probably weren't that good at coming up with plans. Giving up, the Emperor yawned and stretched his arms, pushing the map aside. Suddenly, a member of the Shadow Guard burst into the room, throwing the doors back as he entered. He was covered in sweat and looked like he had run all the way from Markton.

“Emperor Larry, we have a messenger from the Poisoner Empire,” he said, gasping for breath, “you'll never believe what she has to say.”

## **Chapter 2: The Rainbow Republic**

Emperor Larry got up. “Take me to this messenger,” he said, “I hope this isn't about Flashfire again. I've had enough of them for today.”

“It isn't,” said the guard, leading Larry into a small room with a table and two chairs. The messenger was already sitting on one of the chairs. Larry sat down on the other one, and the guard joined four other guards who stood at the entrance of the room, just in case the messenger suddenly attacked the Emperor.

“It is an honour to meet you, mighty Emperor Larry,” the messenger said, bowing.

“Thank you,” said the Emperor, “so, what is your message?”

“A group of Poisoner archaeologists in Colourpest have made an amazing discovery,” she said, “Emperor Peter is already there. He says you should come immediately.”

“Okay, let's go,” said Larry, turning around to face the guards, “go and fetch my coach, but I'm not going to ride it yet. I've been sitting in my throne all day and I need some exercise and fresh air, so I will walk until we reach Owlton.”

A few days later, Larry and the Poisoner messenger arrived at Colourpest, escorted by one of the divisions of the Shadow Guard. Larry got off his coach and walked to the embassy. Emperor Peter and a group of Poisoner archaeologists were waiting at the entrance.

“So, you finally arrived,” said Peter, “what took you so

long? Were you sitting on the throne and getting fat?”

At first, Emperors Larry and Peter had been very formal when they talked to each other, but eventually they had become good friends and now they talked quite informally sometimes.

“No, I've been getting my exercise,” said Larry, “but you had a head start. Maybe you should get more exercise. I swear your tummy has gotten a little bit bigger since we last met.”

“No it hasn't,” said Peter, “anyway, my archaeologists have discovered some old houses buried under Colourpest. In fact, it looks like there are several cities down there, stacked on top of each other inside the hill around the city! Obviously, we can't explore the parts underneath Colourpest because the city might collapse and lots of people live there now. In fact, it's the biggest city in both of our empires now. However, these archaeologists were exploring parts of these cities that are not buried directly underneath Colourpest. Apparently, over the years, the earth around here has moved and parts of the old cities that used to be at the top of the hill have slowly shifted down to the bottom, inside Poisoner territory. Of course, we are busy digging right now, but the archaeologists have already found something very interesting.” He pulled an old, dog-eared book out of his pocket. It had a leather cover and some of the pages were torn out.

“Most of the book is unreadable,” said Peter, “it is written

in a strange language and parts of it have been ripped off, but the archaeologists have managed to work out what the first chapter is saying. Apparently, the city of Colourpest was the capital of the Rainbow Republic.”

“The Rainbow Republic? Who were they?” Larry asked.

“Come inside,” said Emperor Peter, “and I will explain. Archaeologists, you can go back to work now.”

The archaeologists ran off, and Emperor Larry followed Peter into the embassy.

### **Chapter 3: Interesting History**

“Like I said earlier, Colourpest was the capital of the Rainbow Republic,” said Emperor Peter, “apparently, the Rainbow Republic was a gigantic republic that ruled over all of the territories that the Poisoner and Midnight Empires own now. They also owned some other territories as well, which we have since forgotten about. Their flag was all of the colours of the rainbow, plus black at the top and white at the bottom. They built Colourpest and lots of other cities that have since been destroyed. They had lots of different types of military units, including Twin Daggersmen, Poisoner spearmen and archers, Pillager torchers and many others. However, the senator got corrupt and turned the republic into an empire. Everyone was angry and each different type of military unit elected someone who they thought should be the Rainbow Emperor. There was a gigantic war. Most of the factions fighting for the throne were defeated and their cultures were lost. The corrupt Rainbow Emperor was

killed, and only four factions were left: The Twin Daggers, the Poisoners, the Torchers and the Aquatans. The Twin Daggers, Poisoners and Torchers couldn't defeat each other so they all formed separate empires: The Midnight Empire, Poisoner Empire and Pilliager Empire respectively. But the Aquatans were weaker so they ran away, and were never seen again.”

“This is very interesting,” said Emperor Larry, “of course, the Pilliager Empire was defeated and no longer exists, but I wonder where the Aquatans are. Also, you said that the Rainbow Republic used to rule some territories that have since been forgotten. We should send our main armies out to re-discover them, and we might find the Aquatans while we are at it.”

“That's a great idea,” said Peter, pulling out a map of the two empires, “we have spent so long fighting each other that we never did much exploring. What about Flashfire though? They will attack us while we are gone.”

“Our reserve forces and defensive forces can hold them off until our main armies return,” said Larry, “we can defeat them some other time. I'm going to send the Twin Daggers out to explore immediately.”

“It's agreed then,” said Peter, “I will send the Venom Army out to explore as well. Who knows what we will find?”

## **Chapter 4: The Message Arrives**

The Twin Daggers were in the desert that used to be Pilliager territory, camping at the border between Midnight and Poisoner territory. They had just finished sorting out a dispute between the Poisoner governor of a large city called Infernos and a group of Pilliager protesters. The Pilliager protesters had come from a medium sized nearby city on the other side of the border called Asha, and they thought that Asha and Infernos should both be in the same empire. The army had followed them across the border. They were allowed to protest but they had to make sure they didn't cause any trouble. Unfortunately, the Poisoner governor was very racist and told the Pilliager protesters that they were barbarians and should “go back to their little hell-hole in the middle of the desert” where they could “beat each other up and eat each other instead of annoying respectful Poisoner citizens.” The protesters got angry and charged at the governor's keep, so the Twin Daggers stepped in to stop them. The protesters were sent back and told to come back the following week but not to be violent. The governor was told not to be racist to Pilliagers just because of their past, and the Twin Daggers sent a messenger to Colourpest to tell Emperor Peter about the governor and recommend her demotion.

It had been a long, tiring day, and General Mark Moone, leader of the Twin Daggers, was in his tent and about to go to sleep when Captain George peeked into the tent.

“A Midnight Empire messenger from Colourpest wants to see you, sir,” he said.



“What could they want at this time of night?” Mark asked, “Bring the messenger here but tell them not to waste too much time. We haven't slept since yesterday morning, and I'm really tired.” The Twin Daggers did most of their work at night, but they had to accompany the protesters during the daytime so they had been up for a day and a night without sleep.

“Yes, sir,” said Captain George, disappearing from view. A few moments later, he entered the tent, accompanied by a young man with long, messy brown hair that had a black stripe in the middle. He was holding a big sheet of paper which was rolled up into a scroll.

“General Mark, I have some orders from the emperor,” said the messenger, “he said...”

“Pass me the scroll,” said Mark, “I can read it myself.”

“Yes, sir,” said the messenger, giving Mark the scroll. Mark opened it carefully, making sure it didn't rip and spent a few seconds reading it. Then, he looked up. He was grinning.

“This is awesome,” he said, “thanks, messenger! There will be no fighting, and we even get the whole night to sleep!”

The messenger disappeared.

“What is happening, sir?” George asked.

“I'll tell everyone tomorrow,” said Mark, “you should probably get some sleep now.”

## **Chapter 5: Great News**

All of the soldiers in the army gathered in the big clearing in front of General Mark's tent.

“I have some great news,” said Mark, “Emperor Larry has finally decided to start exploring the world!” He held up a big map of the two empires so everyone could see it.

“This map is getting boring,” he said, “nothing has changed for a long time, except the borders. It's still the same boring terrain: Dense forests with a few clearings in the Midnight Empire; forests, rainforests and swamps in the Poisoner Empire; and a giant never-ending desert with a few sand dunes where the Pilliager Empire used to be. Now it is time to explore, to make the map bigger! We could be exploring for years without having to fight!”

There was a lot of cheering from the crowd.

“There is a downside though,” Mark continued in a quieter voice, “the Venom Army is going to explore as well, and we have to join up with them for this mission. That means we have to march during the daytime and sleep at night. It will feel a bit weird since we have been active at night for so long, but I'm sure you will get used to it eventually.”

“But sir, why does Emperor Larry suddenly want us to do this?” Captain George asked.

General Mark explained about the discovery in Colourpest and the old Rainbow Republic.

“If we used to all be united as one republic, why don't we restore it?” One of the younger captains asked, “why don't we restore the Rainbow Republic?”

“It wouldn't work,” said the general, “some people in both big empires still hate people from the other empire because of what happened during the war. If we restored the Rainbow Republic, it would form more terrorist groups. We have already seen how people react when two empires become one. When the Pilliager Empire was defeated, the Flashfire terrorists were formed. We don't want more people like them in our empires, so we can't restore the republic. And even if we found a way to stop Midnight and Poisoner citizens from hating each other, Emperor Peter still wouldn't allow us to unite. He acts really friendly, but I suspect that he only does it because his people want him to. If his people supported him, he would probably close his borders, take over Colourpest and never speak to us again.”

“So, what are we waiting for?” Captain George asked, “let's go!”

## **Chapter 6: One way out**

The Twin Daggers marched over the border to the Poisoner side and headed towards Burnia, where they were supposed to meet the Venom Army.

“Who is the current leader of the Venom Army?” General Mark asked, “I haven't met them yet.”

“It's General Duncan Doomspore,” said Captain George, “I haven't met him either but I heard about him from somewhere. I can't remember where though.”

“I guess we'll find out what he's like when we get there,” said Mark, “hopefully he's easy to get on with.”

The Twin Daggers arrived at Burnia a few days later, and the Venom Army was waiting outside the city gates. The Poisoners had changed the city a lot since Mark was last here, and one of the biggest changes they made was building a wall around it.

“Hello, you must be General Mark,” said a short, fat man with dark brown hair and a white beard, “I am General Duncan.”

“Nice to meet you,” said Mark, “where are we exploring first?”

“We'll just start at Burnia and keep walking directly away from Colourpest until we find something,” said Duncan.

The two armies set off, marching together. Two days later, they reached a wide river of lava. Lots of smoke rose up from the lava, so they couldn't see what was on the other side.

“You go east and we'll go west,” said General Duncan, “we'll see if we can find a way past and then report back.”

After a month of searching, the two armies discovered that the lava river went all the way around the two empires and there was only one way out: A narrow path that was opposite the old Pilliager territory, on the border between the Midnight and Poisoner Empire territories. The lava seemed to go underground at this point so it was possible to get out.

General Duncan sent a messenger to Colourpest with the news and the two armies waited at the exit path for the two Emperors' replies. After five days of waiting, the messenger came back and told them that the new territories they had discovered had been divided between the Midnight and Poisoner Empires, and the territory around where the exit path was would be neutral territory. Some builders were also coming to build a gate and two watchtowers in front of the path, just in case some people tried to sneak in or sneak out. There was room for a few more new cities to be founded in each empire and the two generals were told to go out of the exit path (which the two emperors had named “The Lava Gateway”) and keep exploring. However, it was evening when the messenger came back, so Generals Mark and Duncan agreed to rest for the night. When the wind was blowing from the lava river to the camp, everyone would have to wrap cloth around their faces to avoid breathing in the smoke, but it was too late to start marching. The soldiers of both empires had not had enough rest.

## **Chapter 7: Marching by Lava**

The next day, the two armies crossed through “The Lava Gateway.” They had to walk in single file and wrap cloth around their faces again. Every soldier also had to be careful where they stepped; it was easy to accidentally fall into the lava and drown. As the smoke got thicker, soldiers started coughing and it became harder to see. It was really hot, and they were beginning to sweat. A few Poisoner soldiers fell into the lava with a small splash and a loud scream. Only two Twin Daggersmen fell into the lava though; they usually did most of their work at night so they were used to low visibility.

Eventually, the smoke cleared and the armies emerged. Almost everyone was coughing and it was already evening; it took ages to get everyone through.

“I wonder why it took so long,” said General Duncan, “was the lava river really that wide?”

“No, look,” said General Mark, pointing at the place they had come out from, “the lava river didn't go underground at the Lava Gateway after all. It looped around and formed a long pathway between the two halves of the river. They only go underground here.”

“It's a pretty weird lava river,” said Duncan.

“Yes, definitely,” said Mark, “but unfortunately we'll have to spend another night here. You know what that means?”

“What?” Duncan asked.

“More cloth masks, lots of coughing and low morale among the soldiers.”

## **Chapter 8: Good First Impressions**

The next day, as Mark had predicted, the soldiers were grumpy, disobedient and kept coughing all the time.

“Don't worry,” said Mark, “that was the last night you have to spend near that lava. And if you hurry up and get ready, we won't even be able to see this place by tonight.”

The soldiers ate breakfast and packed up as fast as they could, but some of them were still a bit annoyed. As soon as they were all ready to go, they departed. Mark was an ordinary soldier before, and he knew exactly what happens when soldiers get angry with their generals. He didn't want to be the next general to get stabbed in the night, but a few days of marching and enjoying the view without having to do any fighting would certainly cheer the soldiers up.

A couple of weeks later, the two armies reached a wide river. As they marched, the terrain had gradually been getting colder and wetter. They had marched through a dry forest, which became a rainforest and then a swamp. For the last two days, they had marched across a grassland, with grass still damp with the morning dew. The soldiers' moods had also gradually gotten better as they marched, and now they were completely obedient again and were starting to

enjoy the march. But not all of the soldiers could swim, so the two armies would have to find another way across the river.

It was afternoon, so the armies had a short rest and then kept marching until they found a giant wooden drawbridge, big enough to stretch across the entire river. Unfortunately, it was on the other side and was pulled up.

“There must be some people nearby,” said General Mark excitedly, “it could be the Aquatans!”

“Well, finding the Aquatans is no use if they won't let us across the river,” said General Duncan. “Wait, I know! I'll yell across the river until they lower the drawbridge for us!”

“Don't do anything stupid, Duncan,” said Mark, “we want to give them a good first impression.”

But General Duncan wasn't listening. “HEY, YOU!” He shouted, “LAZY VILLIAGERS! PUT DOWN THE DRAWBRIDGE!”

“You idiot! What do you think you're doing?” Mark whispered, “Are you asking them to cut your head off?”

Five tall, skinny looking men with fishing rods and jet black hair appeared out of the long grass on the other side of the river. They were wearing plain, light blue shirts.

“Who are you?” One of them asked. He spoke with a



strange accent.

“I am General Mark, leader of the Twin Daggers, the main army of the Midnight Empire,” said Mark, “and this rather noisy man is General Duncan, leader of the Venom Army, the main army of the Poisoner Empire.”

“So, you finally got bored of fighting each other and came here to find us,” said the same man who had spoken before, “Judging by what you said when you arrived, you are here to conquer and enslave us, right?”

“No, we were just exploring,” said Mark.

“The Midnight and Poisoner Empires? Exploring?” The man asked. He shook his head. “I don't believe you. The whole point of killing the Rainbow Emperor was to restore the republic and end the corruption. But you two empires were among the first groups to decide that it would be better to choose someone else to be a new Rainbow Emperor instead. After that, the idea of restoring the republic was gone and everyone ran for the throne in a giant bloodbath. I don't believe you are here just to explore, but we will tell the Senator of the Aquatan Republic that you are here anyway, and see what she says.”

“So much for good first impressions,” General Mark sighed.

“It's not my fault,” said General Duncan, “it's their fault for still being so angry about the end of the Rainbow Republic.

That happened a really long time ago, they should have gotten over it by now.”

“That is only partially true,” said General Mark, “but if you had been friendlier, they might have thought we have changed. Now they are probably going to attack us and drive us away.”

“But... But...”

“A few weeks ago, I thought you were a great general,” said Mark, shaking his head, “but I was wrong.”

## **Chapter 9: Guests or prisoners?**

The two armies waited and waited for someone to return and lower the drawbridge, but nobody arrived and it was getting late so they set up a camp and went to sleep.

The next morning, a group of soldiers wearing light blue leather armour appeared at the drawbridge. Some of them had flails and grappling hooks and others had tridents. Some of the ones with tridents were also carrying folded up nets, which were tied to their backs. All of them were tall and skinny looking, and most of them had black hair. One of them, who was holding a flail and a grappling hook, stepped forwards.

“I am General Riley Riverto, leader of the Tydal Troopers, the main army of the Aquatan Republic,” he said, “We are here to take General Mark and General Duncan to a nearby town called Fishington. Luckily, we were quite close to

Fishington when we heard about you, otherwise it would have taken us a few more days to get here.”

“This is great, we get to see one of their towns!” Duncan exclaimed.

“It could be a trap,” said Mark, “are we allowed to take some soldiers just in case?”

“You can take some soldiers for protection,” said Riley, “but only five from each empire.”

“Five is not enough,” said Mark, “you could be trying to kill us.”

“Come with us now,” said General Riley, “I never said you had a choice. If you don't come with us, we will tell our leader, Senator Amy, and she will probably order us to attack you, accompanied by our defensive army, the Seaweed Police. We Aquatans are masters of combat near water. You would stand no chance fighting us.”

“It looks like we don't have a choice,” said General Duncan, “let's go.” He chose three Poison Spearmen and two Poison Archers to come with him.

“This is all your fault,” said General Mark, selecting five of his best Twin Daggersmen to accompany him. General Riley ordered his men to lower the drawbridge. Mark and Duncan crossed it with their guards, and then it was raised again.

## **Chapter 10: The Jail in Fishington**

Mark, Duncan and their guards marched with the Tydal Troopers for half a day. Then, they reached a small town, and General Riley told them they had arrived in Fishington.

“So, now that we are here, what are you planning to do to us?” General Duncan asked.

“It is Senator Amy's job to decide that,” said Riley, “you will meet her in Fishington; we have already sent a messenger to fetch her. She should be here in a few days' time, and she will tell you a little bit about the Aquatan Republic. Then, you will tell us a little bit about your empires and why you are really here. If Senator Amy is in a good mood, and you have a good reason for being here, she might let you go. If she isn't or she thinks you are lying, you won't be allowed to leave. I've heard that she needs a few more servants to clean the outdoor pool in her castle, and you would do just fine. Meanwhile, you will stay in the local jail. Do not attempt to escape, or you will be killed immediately.”

He led them through the town, past houses made of small tree trunks and large tree branches, tied together with seaweed. The tree trunks and branches were painted light blue. A few citizens walked in and out of these houses, carrying fishing rods and looking at them curiously.

“Do you really live in houses like that?” Duncan asked.

“Not all of us,” said Riley, “those are the cheapest houses. If you have enough money, you can get one of those houses.” He pointed at some houses in the distance, which were made completely out of wooden planks, also painted light blue. A lot of them had large glass windows, which were very rare in the Midnight and Poisoner empires, because glass was hard to find in those empires. Also, if you lived in the Midnight Empire and had a house with a large window, it would definitely somehow get smashed or broken within a month of you moving in.

Riley led Mark and Duncan into a large building with stone walls that were painted dark blue and iron bars for windows.

“This is the jail,” said Riley, “we Aquatans are generous so we will give you a group cell instead of putting you in individual cells. Take your pick, but it doesn't really matter because they're all the same.”

“The fourth cell,” said Mark, “four is my lucky number.”

“What a coincidence,” said Duncan, “it's my lucky number too!”

“Unfortunately, luck is not what you need,” said Mark, “what you need is brains.”

The prison cell was surprisingly roomy, and the iron bars that were the windows were quite big so the cell was not dark. You could even see the river from the window if you

looked out at the right angle. However, the beds were not very comfy. They were painted light blue, unsurprisingly, and there were enough for everyone, but they were just single mattresses on wooden frames. The mattresses were very thin and there were no springs, so Mark found the beds very uncomfortable. After dinner was served (It was salmon and it was delicious, but there wasn't very much of it) everyone went to bed, but Mark couldn't get to sleep. He kept tossing and turning.

*It is a prison after all, he told himself, you can't expect it to be a good place to be.*

He was pleased to see that General Duncan also couldn't get to sleep. It was Duncan's fault that they were in this mess, and he was getting the bad treatment that he deserved. It was this thought that finally got Mark to sleep.

## **Chapter 11: Meeting the Senator**

Mark, Duncan and their ten guards had to stay in the prison cell for three days while they waited for Senator Amy to arrive. Early in the morning of the fourth day, Mark got up. It had been a long night and he hadn't gotten much sleep. He felt like his whole back was on fire.

“It's time to meet Senator Amy,” said General Riley, who was standing outside the cell.

“Okay, let's go,” said Mark, “Duncan, try not to say anything. You'll only make it worse.”

Duncan didn't reply.

Riley lead Mark, Duncan and the ten guards out of the cell and down a few corridors, to a small room. There were three chairs in the room, and Senator Amy was sitting on one of them.

“The guards will have to stay outside,” said Riley.

Mark and Duncan walked into the room, leaving their guards behind. General Riley came into the room too, and stood behind the senator.

“Welcome to the Aquatan Republic,” said Senator Amy, “I have heard a lot about you. I hope you have a good reason for being here, otherwise you might not be able to leave. Unfortunately, our countries have not had a good relationship in the past, but I hope you have changed and we can move on. But let's start by telling each other a little bit about our countries. I want to find out how much you have changed.”

So Generals Mark and Duncan told Senator Amy about the Midnight and Poisoner Empires, and how they finally teamed up and defeated the Pilliager Empire. Then Amy told them about the Aquatan Republic.

Even though the Aquatans had been seperated from the Midnight and Poisoner Empires for so long, their culture was still surprisingly similar to them. The Aquatans were great fishermen apparently, and before they left, they were

located in Poisoner territory, near rivers and in marshes. The Poisoners only had the forests and rainforests, they had taken the rivers and marshes after the Aquatans left. Just like the two empires, they had a main army, the Tydal Troopers, and the Seaweed Police, their defending army. However, unlike the empires, they had no reserve force, and instead they made the other two armies slightly bigger. They had two kinds of soldiers: One kind had flails and grappling hooks, and were used for small battles or attacking cities. The other kind fought with tridents and giant nets and were used for larger attacks, trapping their opponents in the nets and then stabbing them with their tridents. Just like the empires, they had a precious stone, the diamond, and their flag was a blue tidal wave on a sand coloured background.

The Aquatan Republic was on a large piece of land between three rivers, which crossed each other at three different points and created a triangle of water, like a moat surrounding the whole country. It was pretty weird, but the Midnight and Poisoner Empires being surrounded by lava was even weirder so this place seemed completely normal in comparison. The country was a republic, and Amy had only been elected recently. There was an election every five years so the senator still had about four and a half years left in power. The citizens could vote to have an early election, but they only did that if they hated their leader, and they liked Amy so the chances of that happening were very low.

“You have certainly changed a lot,” said Amy, “but why are you still empires and not republics?”



“Our people are used to being in an empire,” said Mark, “we have been lead by emperors for so long that it is hard to switch back.”

“You seem to be much better than before though,” said Amy, “maybe we could be allies in the future. In the Aquatan Republic, we wrote down the history of the Rainbow Republic and still have copies of it, so some of us still hate your empires because you wanted your own leaders to be the Rainbow Emperor and fought against us in the war. We are also a republic and some of my people think that all empires are evil. But you have changed a lot now, and now that the Pilliagers have been defeated and Emperor Shade is gone, maybe we can start trading, opening our borders and even become allies. I'm sure I could convince my people that you are okay now eventually. But first, tell me why you came here.”

“We were just exploring,” said General Mark, “we found the Lava Gateway, which is the only way to get in or out of the area where our two empires are, and we were told to explore through the Gateway and directly away from Colourpest.”

“The Midnight and Poisoner Empires are not known for doing much exploring,” said Senator Amy, “why did you suddenly start now?”

General Duncan opened his mouth to reply, but Mark glared at him and he quickly shut it again. Mark explained about

the discovery of the old book that was found in Poisoner territory and how the two empires wanted to explore and find the Aquatans.

“So, you're saying that not only did you forget about the Rainbow Republic, but then you only rediscovered what happened just now?”

“Yes,” said Mark.

Amy shook her head in disbelief. “You should have written it down,” she said, “but you seem to be telling the truth so I will let you go. Tell your emperors that you found us and we might be interested in trading. We have some very tasty fish to offer.”

“Thank you, Senator,” said Mark. Mark and Duncan got up and prepared to leave when a messenger pushed the door open and threw himself into the room. He was covered in sweat and panting like a dog.

“Senator,” he gasped, “there is a large group of soldiers outside Aquatan territory. They are camped near where the Midnight and Poisoner Empire soldiers are camping. They claim to be rebels fighting to restore the Pilliager Empire, and they had a brief skirmish with the Midnight and Poisoner soldiers. A few soldiers on each side were killed, but we stepped in and stopped them from fighting. The leader of the so-called Flashfire is here to see you.”

“Oh no,” Mark groaned, “this can't be good.”

## Chapter 12: Tom Infernos

“Hello, I am Tom Infernos, leader of the Flashfire,” said a tall, muscular man with a big, red beard.

Amy had asked to see the leader of the Flashfire immediately, and now he was standing in this room with the two generals. He was the leader of the terrorist group they had been fighting, the troublemakers who destroyed towns and looted cities. Mark wanted to punch him in the head, but he knew that would damage the relationship between the two empires and the Aquatans so he didn't.

“Nice to meet you,” said Senator Amy, “what brings you to the Aquatan Republic?”

“We need your help,” said Tom Infernos, “the evil Midnight and Poisoner Empires have destroyed the Pilliager Empire, captured our emperor and enslaved our citizens. They have probably told you what happened, but that is just Midnight and Poisoner propaganda. The Pilliager Empire actually become very civilized and we were trying to end the war, but the Midnight and Posioner Empires were really racist and hated us. They could not get over the fact that we were not uncivilized and barbaric anymore, so they attacked us and treated our citizens with the worst cruelty you can imagine. And they call *us* the barbarians. The Poisoner and Midnight Empires have not changed at all, they are still evil and kill or enslave people wherever possible. You must help us to defeat them and restore our empire. If you help us, you can have the whole of the Poisoner territory and half of

the Midnight Empire. We will reclaim our own territory and take the other half of the Midnight Empire. There are not very many soldiers left who know the Pilliager way of fighting, so we will have to train some of your soldiers to fight that way, but apart from that, all you have to do is send in your soldiers to help us and we will share the reward.”

“This is very interesting,” said Senator Amy, turning around to face Mark and Duncan, “is this man telling the truth or is he lying? Is there anything you want to say to defend yourselves?”

“This man is lying,” said General Mark, “the Pilliager Empire was still uncivilised and barbaric when we conquered it. They were still attacking the Midnight and Poisoner empires. And after we conquered the Pilliager Empire, we made sure the Pilliager citizens could apply to have the same rights as our own citizens, as long as they agreed with our values. In fact, most of them are considered to be normal citizens already. The Flashfire are just a terrorist group who are still loyal to Emperor Ryan Rager, who used to be their leader and is currently in a prison in Colourpest. We think he is mad, he keeps threatening to break out of prison and kill us with his bare hands.”

“How did you manage to get here anyway?” General Duncan asked, glaring at Tom Infernos, “the two emperors told us they were building a gate and some watchtowers at the Lava Gateway to stop people from going in or out without a good reason. How did you get out, you evil

barbarians?”

Tom Infernos did not reply, he just stood where he was and laughed.

“Are you laughing at me, you stupid barbarian?” Duncan shouted, “Tell me how you got out now, or I will strangle you to death!”

“I think you are being a little bit extreme,” said Mark, “the Flashfire terrorists are bad people, but they don't deserve this. We don't kill people in our empires anymore.”

“We have spies all over your empires,” said Tom Infernos, grinning, “they told us that you were going exploring so we decided to follow you and try to find the Aquatans first, so that they could help us. When we got to the Lava Gateway, the gate and watchtowers were still under construction. Your two foolish emperors didn't leave any troops there to defend the builders so we chased them away and destroyed as much of the building materials as we could. Then we escaped and came here. Your soldiers left a path that was very easy to follow, so it was extremely easy to follow you and get here.”

“But when you attacked the Lava Gateway, you didn't chase the builders away, did you?” Duncan said, “I bet you tied them up and threw them in the lava.”

“More propaganda from the Poisoner Empire,” said Tom, shaking his head.

“The Midnight and Poisoner Empires do not make propaganda!” Duncan yelled, “and I believe that you insulted our emperors as well! You have no respect for us, so we will have no respect for you! You deserve to die, barbarian!”

“This is perfect,” said Tom, pointing at General Duncan, “this is proof that everything I said to you is right and everything they said is wrong! This man is racist, wants to kill me and thinks we are uncivilised barbarians. This proves that we are the good guys and they are the bad guys.”

Duncan glared at Tom, fuming. He balled his hands into fists and got into a fighting stance.

“Duncan, stop this,” said Mark, “I told you not to say anything because it would just make things worse. And now look what's happened! You said something and made things worse!”

Duncan didn't reply. Instead, he opened his mouth and yelled lots of swear words and curses at Tom. They spewed out of his mouth like vomit.

“No swearing in front of the Senator,” said General Rivero, “get out of this room immediately.” He led Duncan out of the room. Duncan's face was red with rage and he looked like he was about to explode.

“Well, it seems like you were right,” said Senator Amy, “the Midnight and Poisoner Empires have not changed at all. Mark, I am going to let you and Duncan go. When you are released, go straight back to your empires and take your whole army with you. Tell your emperors that we have teamed up with Flashfire and we will start a war in a month's time. You will have time to get prepared. Now get out of my sight. Tom, stay here. We need to talk and think of a strategy. We are going to fight two empires at once, which will be very hard, but I'm sure we will think of something eventually.”

“Yes, I'm sure we will,” said Tom, “we will make a great team. The red and blue countries, fighting together to achieve a common goal.”

“But Tom is lying,” said General Mark, “General Duncan is just a little bit irritable sometimes. If you team up with Tom, he will probably turn against you somehow and take over your country. He will destroy us all!”

“Go away, now,” said Amy, “and don't come back. I'm sick of hearing your stupid propaganda.”

General Mark left the room, furious with General Duncan. This was all his fault. General Riley and his soldiers led Mark, Duncan and their guards out of Fishington and back over the drawbridge to their camp outside Aquatan territory, where their armies were waiting. Mark looked around to see if he could see the Flashfire camp but it was nowhere to be found. They must have moved it away to avoid a fight.

Mark was not sure what the two armies were going to do. They would have to go home to tell the two emperors about what had happened, but then what? Would they attack first or would they defend? Only one thing was for sure: Mark was going to have a long chat with Duncan that night.

### **Chapter 13: Back to Colourpest**

That night, Mark and Duncan had a long argument. Duncan refused to believe he had done anything wrong and argued that Tom was a terrorist who had said bad things about the Midnight and Poisoner Empires, so Duncan was “just defending the two mighty empires from pathetic barbarian lies.” Mark tried to explain how what Duncan had said actually helped Tom to convince Senator Amy that he was telling the truth, but Duncan wasn't listening so Mark eventually gave up. He would have to meet the two emperors personally and tell them about this. Duncan obviously did not deserve to be a general.

The next day, General Mark told the soldiers what happened, but he left out exactly what he and Duncan said to avoid lowering the other general's reputation. It was no use though. As soon as he finished his speech, a Poison Spearman said, “I bet it was General Duncan's fault.”

“How did you know?” Mark asked.

“He's the worst general ever, sir,” said the spearman, “he's always been like this. He doesn't get on well with anyone. Everyone in the Poisoner Empire hates him, including us.”



“I will have to inform the emperors about this,” said Mark.

The two armies set off, marching back the way they had come and back through the Lava Gateway. The gate and watchtowers were partially built and there were a few builders working on it. Also, a division of the Shadow Guard and a division of the Poison Police were guarding the watchtowers.

“Hello, General Mark,” said one of the Shadow Guard captains, “we were told to stay here because Flashfire attacked this location. They tied the builders up and threw them in the lava river. We had to get replacement builders.”

“We thought they would,” said Mark, “do you know how many Flashfire soldiers were here?”

“No,” said the captain, “but there is no sign of Flashfire activity anywhere in either empire. Also, some settlers were building a town on a nearby hill and saw lots of soldiers there, so we think the entire Flashfire force has gone through the Lava Gateway.”

“You probably need more builders,” said Mark, “the gate and watchtowers need to be finished in one month's time.” He explained what had happened in Fishington.

“Okay sir, we will try to find some more builders, but most of them are busy building new towns and cities so I'm not sure if we can find any.”

“Okay, good luck,” said Mark, “Come on everyone, let's go! It's evening, but we don't want to spend another night near that horrible lava river, do we?”

The soldiers kept marching for a few days, until they were outside Colourpest.

“Captain George, I'm leaving you in charge of the Twin Daggers for now,” said General Mark, “I need to talk to the emperors.”

“Yes, sir,” said George.

Mark walked through the gates of Colourpest and into the embassy but the emperors were not there. He got two messengers, one from each empire, to fetch them. Then he waited in the meeting room in silence. It would take a while for the emperors to get here and he would have to either find accommodation for himself in Colourpest or go back to the army camp while he waited. But a lot had happened recently and he needed time to think about it, and convince himself that it had really happened and wasn't just a dream.

Eventually, he went back to the army camp to wait, and four days later, the emperors arrived. He told them what had happened in Fishington.

“That is very bad,” said Emperor Larry, “send all the Twin Daggers to Invisia immediately. Invisia is a newly founded town near the lava river and we plan to grow it into

a small city. In a few weeks' time, you will have to go to the Lava Gateway and defend, but we'll send a messenger to tell you when it is time to go.”

“Take the Venom Army with you as well, said Emperor Peter, “and tell General Duncan that he is fired. His behaviour on this mission is disappointing. I don't have enough time to appoint a new general so you will have to be the general of both armies.”

“I don't know much about Poisoner tactics though,” said Mark, “are you sure it's a good idea for me to be the general of both armies?”

“It's not ideal,” said Peter, “but like I said before, we don't have enough time to appoint a new general. If you need help, you could talk to some of the Poisoner captains.”

“You can do it, Mark,” said Larry, “we both used to be soldiers, remember? We managed to defeat Emperor Shade, so this will be easy.”

“Thanks for your support, Emperors,” said Mark, “We will go to Invisia tomorrow.”

Mark left the meeting room and went back to the army camp to tell everyone what was happening. It was evening again, and the war only started in one month's time so there was plenty of time to rest. He was also happy that Duncan got fired and couldn't wait to tell him!

## **Chapter 14: Getting ready for war**

After Mark announced that he was going to be the general of both armies, the soldiers were really happy. They liked Mark and knew he was a great general.

Then his favourite part: Telling Duncan he was fired. After he heard the news, Duncan stood still and didn't speak, paralysed by disbelief that slowly grew into anger.

“What is wrong with Emperor Peter?!” He yelled, “How dare he fire me on such short notice! Mark, you have no idea how to control Poisoner troops! I must go to Colourpest and get the Emperor to make me a general again, otherwise we will lose the war!”

He ran out of the army camp and up the hill to Colourpest, but there were some Poison Police soldiers on the walls, and they shut the gate as he approached.

“Let me in!” He shouted, “I need to talk to Emperor Peter!”

One of the guards blew a raspberry. Another one shot an arrow that narrowly missed Duncan. Screaming with frustration and rage, the useless Poisoner general pounded his fists against the gate and swore at the soldiers.

“I think we should just leave him there and go to Invisia,” said Mark, “if we're lucky, he won't notice that we've packed up and left until we're almost out of sight.”

The two armies packed up and started marching until they

reached Invisia. Builders were busy building houses all over the place, and citizens were preparing to move in.

“I don't think they have enough houses for us to stay in,” said Mark, “we'll have to set up a camp next to the city and stay there. The builders look like they are already having trouble building houses faster than new citizens are arriving, we don't want to make the problem worse.”

The armies waited at Invisia for almost a whole month while they waited for the war to begin. They spent the time preparing: Sharpening their weapons and practicing fighting. Eventually, a messenger from Colourpest came to tell them that the war was going to start soon and they should probably head over to the Lava Gateway. The gate and watchtowers were now complete, and Mark ordered some of the Poison Archers to climb into the towers, ready to shoot down at approaching enemies. The gate was closed and a large open area was created behind it, where the battle would take place if Flashfire and the Aquatan soldiers somehow managed to get through the gate. They stayed there for a couple of days without any sign of the enemy. But on the third day, one of the Poisoner archers on the right watchtower shouted, “Flashfire Torchers approaching!” Everyone immediately got into their positions. The battle was about to begin.

## **Chapter 15: The Battle of the Lava Gateway**

The Flashfire Torchers quickly moved towards the gate. They were not hindered by the smoke from the lava river; Torchers carry sticks that are on fire so they are used to

being near a lot of smoke. Some of them did not look like Pilliagers, they actually looked like Aquatans. Mark, who was on the left watchtower, realised that those were the Aquatan soldiers who had to learn how to fight the Pilliager way, as part of the deal between Tom and Senator Amy.

The Poison Archers fired several volleys of arrows down at the Torchers. About half of them hit their targets, causing soldiers to slow down and become dizzy. The soldiers behind them tripped over them, sometimes causing soldiers to fall into the lava river. But there were several Torchers who avoided falling into the lava or getting hit by the poisonous arrows, and even the poisoned soldiers could still keep fighting for a while before the poison made them black out. The remaining Torchers flicked their wrists and caused fireballs to fly everywhere. Luckily, the watchtower and gates were not made of wood, but they still set some of the archers in the right watchtower on fire. The fire quickly spread to almost everyone in that tower, since there were so many archers in there. And more Torchers were coming out of the smoke, throwing their fallen comrades into the lava river as they marched. They were flanked by Tydal Troopers, and Mark noticed that all of them were the ones with flails and grappling hooks. Grappling hooks soared through the air. Some of them hit the gate or the watchtowers, but others missed and dragged the soldiers who used them into the lava. The Torchers stood underneath the gate and sent more fireballs flying towards the left watchtower. Meanwhile, the Tydal Troopers used their grappling hooks to climb onto the gate and start opening it. Arrows flew towards them and some of them

fell off, poisoned. Poison Spearmen waited under the gate to catch them and take them to a jail, which had been built in a nearby town. One of the Tydal Troopers swung his flail around his head, expertly blocking arrows and sending them flying back towards the archers who fired them. A few archers were even hit by the poisonous arrows they had fired.

“They are opening the gate!” Mark shouted, “everyone get off the watchtowers and into your positions!”

The gate slowly opened and the Torchers charged through. The Tydal Troopers landed in front of them, using their grappling hooks like bungee jumping cords to cushion their falls.

*They look so calm and they are so skinny, General Mark thought, they don't look like tough warriors. How strong can they be?*

Finally, breaking the silence, the Poison Spearmen charged. They had formed a massive line in front of the gate, with Poison Archers behind them. The Twin Daggers crouched behind the Archers, ready to spring to action if they were needed. Spearmen stabbed at Tydal Troopers while Poison Archer arrows soared overhead. One of the arrows hit a Flashfire Torcher in the eye and he fell backwards. Then his head hit another Torcher's stick and caught on fire. He ran around screaming and causing chaos. But the Flashfire still somehow managed to send fireballs hurtling down towards the Poison Archers, setting a few of

them on fire.

Then, suddenly and without warning, the Tydal Troopers sprang to action, charging forwards at lightning speed and smashing Poison Spearman spears to bits with their heavy flails and knocking the soldiers backwards, creating a domino-like effect of soldiers falling backwards.

*Wow, Mark thought, Their looks are decieving. They are so fast... And so strong. And worst of all, they seem to be winning the battle.*

“We are losing the battle,” said Mark, “the Poisoner soldiers need help. Twin Daggersmen, charge!”

The Twin Daggersmen, who had remained concealed until just now, jumped up and charged at the Tydal Troopers. They moved really fast, jumping over the bodies of dead Poison Archers and Spearman. The Tydal Troopers were taken by surprise and couldn't move their heavy flails fast enough to counter the fast-moving, light daggers of the Twin Daggersmen. Several of the Aquatan warriors fell and the remaining Aquatans and Torchers began to retreat, running back through the Lava Gateway as quickly as they had come.

“We won the first battle,” said Mark, while his soldiers searched the battlefield for soldiers who were still alive, “but we are still a long way away from winning this war. We will have one night of rest here so we can get healed, and then we should go back to the Aquatan Republic. We



will keep attacking them and capturing their cities until they surrender. It is sad that this had to happen, but there is nothing we can do about it now. All we can do is fight for our country and hope for the best.”

## **Chapter 16: Back to the Aquatan Republic**

That evening, Mark was just about to go to sleep. There was a long march ahead, and he needed to get some rest. But two Poison Spearmen appeared outside his tent, carrying a wounded Tydal Trooper. The Aquatan soldier had been stabbed by a Poison Spearmen but had been given the cure after he was captured.

“This soldier wanted to talk to you, sir,” said one of the Poison Spearmen.

“Okay,” said Mark, “but make it quick. I need to get some sleep. What do you want to tell me, Tydal Trooper?”

“You have to help us,” said the Aquatan warrior, “we were tricked.”

“What happened?” Mark asked.

“They captured Senator Amy,” said the Trooper, “they locked her in her castle in our capital, Splasha. They are forcing us to do what they say, otherwise they will kill her. You have to help us free her.”

“Okay,” said Mark, “I'm not sure if you are telling the truth or not, but we're heading to Splasha anyway so I guess we

will find out. If you are telling the truth, it will be good to get some Aquatans on our side. It doesn't look like you're strong enough to fight at the moment but we'll take you with us anyway. You might be useful eventually.”

“Thank you,” said the Tydal Trooper, “if you free Amy, we will help you fight Flashfire. Some of the Aquatans have become a bit corrupt though. Flashfire are paying them a lot of money to fight for them, so not all of us will join you.”

“We will keep that in mind,” said Mark, “Poison Spearmen, take the Tydal Trooper to one of your army tents. We do not have enough time to set up a seperate tent for him, it is quite late.”

“Yes, sir,” said the Poison Spearmen, picking up the Tydal Trooper and hurrying off.

The next day, the army set off. They spent another day crossing through the Lava Gateway, but this time they were used to it so they were able to get a reasonable distance away from the lava before they made a camp for the night. It took a few weeks to get back to the Aquatan Republic, and the enemy armies were nowhere in sight. They were obviously travelling as fast as they could, keen to get across the river before the Midnight and Poisoner armies arrived.

When the two armies arrived, the drawbridge was up. This was a problem because there weren't very many lakes or rivers in the Midnight Empire so most people in the Empire didn't know how to swim. There were a reasonable number

of lakes and rivers in the Poisoner Empire, but it was still uncommon for Poisoner citizens or soldiers to know how to swim. And judging by the size of the drawbridge, six people would be needed to lower it. Mark asked the soldiers of both armies if there were any volunteers. Four soldiers from the Venom Army volunteered, and one Midnight Empire soldier. But they still needed one more person to lower the gigantic, heavy drawbridge.

“I'll help,” said the Tydal Trooper, “Most Aquatans know how to swim since our republic is surrounded by water.”

“You are injured though,” said Mark, “are you sure you can do it?”

“I'll be fine,” said the Trooper.

The six soldiers jumped into the river and swam to the other side. The Tydal Trooper struggled a bit but somehow managed to get across the river with a few grunts of pain. They lowered the drawbridge and both armies marched across. By the time everyone had gotten to the other side of the river, it was evening.

“We will have to camp here for the night,” said Mark, “someone will have to keep watch just in case we get attacked. We are in enemy territory now so we have to be careful. But at dawn tomorrow, we will start marching again. We're going back to Fishington.”

## **Chapter 17: The Battle of Fishington**

The next morning, the two armies marched to Fishington. When they arrived, the Twin Daggers hid in the long grass around the town while the Poison Spearmen and Archers charged.

“Poisoners approaching!” Yelled a Flashfire Torch who was standing on the roof of a building. Then he jumped down and joined a group of Torches who were getting ready to fight the charging Poisoners.

The Poison Spearmen charged and stabbed some of the Torches with their spears. The Torches set a few Poison Spearmen on fire and then turned around, running away.

“What are they doing?” Captain George asked from the bushes.

“I don't know, but it could be a trap,” General Mark whispered, “I want to warn them but that would reveal our location.”

The Poison Spearmen charged, chasing the retreating Torches, but the Torches had lighter weapons so they easily outran the Spearmen. The Poison Archers fired some arrows that hit some of the Torches, but one of them accidentally hit a Poison Spearman. The Poison Spearmen who had been set on fire or were poisoned turned back at this point, but the healthy soldiers kept charging, jumping over the bodies of Torches who were so weak from the poison that they had to crawl.

Suddenly, the Torchers jumped off the road and some Aquatan soldiers appeared from behind some houses. These ones were holding tridents, and they were all holding ropes attached to a giant net that was spread across the road. They charged, and the Poison Spearmen did not turn around fast enough. Almost all of them were caught in the net, and the Aquatans tied a knot in it to create a big ball of Poison Spearmen. Next, they pulled some of the weapons out and threw them away. Then they used their tridents to stab the Poison Spearmen repeatedly.

“I thought it was a trap,” said General Mark, “but I didn't expect this. I only expected a little trap that might catch two or three of them.”

The Poison Spearmen who were not caught in the net were now attacking the Aquatans, and the Poison Archers were also shooting them, but the Torchers ran back onto the road again and hurled fireballs back at the archers.

“I think it's time to attack,” Mark whispered. The Twin Daggers suddenly jumped out of the long grass and charged towards the Torchers at full speed, dodging the fireballs. Then they attacked the Torchers at close range, stabbing and dodging. The Flashfire terrorists tried to set the Twin Daggers on fire with their flaming torches, but most of them weren't fast enough and more of the barbarians were falling to the ground, dead, wounded or unconscious, every minute. Meanwhile, the Poison Archers no longer had to worry about the Torchers so they shot all

of the Aquatans instead.

But just as General Mark thought they were going to win and dared to breathe a sigh of relief, one of the Torchers set the net with the Poison Spearmen in it on fire! The spearmen inside screamed in pain. There wasn't enough time to get a bucket of water to put the flames out, and if the Twin Daggers tried to put the fire out without water, the Flashfire Torchers would kill a lot of them. But if they kept fighting the Torchers until they were all defeated, it would be too late and all of the Poison Spearmen in the net would either be dead or have severe burns.

Luckily, a group of Aquatan citizens turned up just in time! Some of them were carrying buckets of water, which they poured over the net to put the fire out. Then they untied the knot and helped the Poison Spearmen out. Some of the Spearmen had already been burned too badly to fight, and others had twisted ankles and broken or dislocated bones from being squashed in the net. At least they were all still alive though!

Other Aquatans carried tridents and nets, or flails and grappling hooks. They helped the Twin Daggers to finish off the Torchers. It had been a very close battle, but the two armies had won.

## **Chapter 18: Getting to the Capital**

About half of the Poison Spearmen were unable to fight due to their injuries, and there were a few dead or injured Twin Daggers and Poison Archers too. Luckily, after General

Mark told the Aquatans who lived in Fishington why the two armies were here, they said the injured Spearmen could stay in Fishington, and they would look after them until they healed. They thanked General Mark and the two armies for freeing the town from Flashfire and coming to the Aquatan Republic to save Senator Amy. However, they were worried that Flashfire might kill Amy if they realised the two armies were in Aquatan territory.

“Yes, that is a possibility,” said General Mark, “but I don't see what else we could do. Would you rather let us go to save Senator Amy and risk Flashfire killing her or live as barbarians under Flashfire rule forever?”

Some of the Aquatans who lived in the town and knew how to fight decided to join the two armies and help them free Senator Amy. Others also wanted to help but were afraid Flashfire would kill Amy if they joined. The Aquatans who joined the army told Mark that the Aquatan soldiers with tridents who attacked the Poison Spearmen were from the Seaweed Police. The Seaweed Police mainly used soldiers with tridents and nets, and didn't have very many with flails and grappling hooks, since the soldiers with flails and grappling hooks were usually only used in sieges and the Seaweed Police was a defense army. Apparently, the Tydal Troopers were going back to Splasha, the capital of the Aquatan Republic, to recover from the Battle of the Lava Gateway. The Seaweed Police and some of the Flashfire Torchers had been told to defend Aquatan territory from intruders. Splasha was also the place that Flashfire was keeping Amy captive at.

Mark ordered all of the soldiers who were still healthy to search the battlefield for troops from either side who were still alive. They found some friendly soldiers, and also a few more Poison Police soldiers. Some of these soldiers were completely loyal to Flashfire, but others said they would join the two armies in their fight to free Amy, if their wounds could be healed in time. A few wounded Flashfire Torchers were found as well. All of the soldiers who were loyal to Flashfire were put in the town jail, and everyone else who was wounded were taken to the town hospital to be healed. Some of them had been poisoned by Poisoner arrows or spears and were given the cure.

The two armies stayed in Fishington for a couple more days while they waited for more soldiers to be healed, so they could join the army. Then they set off again, leaving their more seriously wounded comrades behind. Their plan was to head straight to Splasha, freeing any towns or cities that they passed along the way.

About a week later, the two armies were outside Splasha and ready to attack. They had attacked several towns and cities along the way. Their closest battles were in the small cities of Seabeddo and Liquidonoto, where the Seaweed Police soldiers had smaller nets that you could only fit one person in. There were two soldiers per net, and they kept trapping soldiers in the nets and throwing them into wells in the middle of the city to drown. Luckily, most of them were saved just in time, but a few unlucky soldiers drowned.



But now, the biggest battle was about to begin. According to the Aquatans who had joined the two armies, the Tydal Troopers were still in this city. There were also members of Flashfire and the Seaweed Police in there. Most of the enemy soldiers were in that one city, and the outcome of this battle might decide the outcome of the whole war. Also, both types of Aquatan soldier were in the city. The soldiers with flails and grappling hooks were not ideal for a defensive battle like this, but the Tydal Troopers were trapped in the Aquatan capital. If any of them left, it would increase the chance of Senator Amy being saved, and then most of the Aquatans would turn against Flashfire and the war would be over.

“Is everyone ready?” General Mark asked his soldiers, “this is a very important battle.”

“Yes, we're ready!” All of the soldiers yelled together.

“Then let's go!” General Mark exclaimed, leading the two armies towards the outskirts of Splasha.

## **Chapter 19: The Battle of Splasha**

The two armies and the Aquatans who had joined them were ready to attack the city of Splasha. Splasha had no walls, but it did have a giant moat surrounding it, with a few drawbridges connecting the inner city to the outskirts, where the armies were now waiting. Most of the Aquatans who lived in the outskirts were on their side so they did not have to worry about them.

“The flail and grappling hook Aquatans will have to lower the nearest drawbridge,” said General Mark, “hopefully, nobody will notice them. If someone notices them, the Poison Archers will charge out and shoot the enemies. After the drawbridge is lowered, the Twin Daggers and flail and grappling hook Aquatans will head into the city to try to find Senator Amy. We can't let Flashfire kill her during the battle. Meanwhile, the Poison Archers, the trident and net Aquatans and the Poison Spearmen will attack the enemy armies and distract them. Got it?”

All of the soldiers nodded and followed the plan as instructed. Unfortunately, a Flashfire member on the other side of the moat noticed the flail and grappling hook Aquatans, and ran away shouting “We're under attack!” The Poison Archers marched to the river bank and drew back their bows, but the enemy armies had not arrived yet and everyone was able to get across the moat. Finally, the enemies showed up. There were lots of Aquatan soldiers with tridents and nets, flanked by Flashfire Torchers. The Poison Archers started shooting at the Torchers, who launched fireballs back. The Poison Spearmen who were still alive charged, but remembering the Battle of Fishington, they spread out so they could not be easily trapped in a net. The enemy Aquatans with tridents and nets charged, wrapping a few of the Poison Spearmen in nets. Most of them were able to avoid the nets though, and they stabbed nearby Aquatans with their spears. The Aquatans fought back with their tridents, but the tridents were not as powerful as the poison tip spears because they didn't have any poison on them. However, there were a lot more

Aquatans than Poison Spearmen so the Aquatans still had the advantage. But then the friendly trident and net Aquatans charged, taking the enemy Aquatans by surprise and wrapping most of them in *their* nets. The enemy Torchers noticed that the Aquatans on their side were losing the battle, so they rushed in to set the friendly Aquatans on fire. Big mistake. With nobody shooting the Poison Archers, the Archers were able to aim better and shot one enemy after another. The two armies were winning the battle.

Meanwhile, the Twin Daggersmen and friendly Aquatans with flails and grappling hooks crept past the enemy lines and snuck further into the city. The Twin Daggersmen avoided being seen by sneaking around on the ground. The Aquatans with flails and grappling hooks used the grappling hooks to get onto the rooves of the houses and ran from roof to roof. Some of the citizens noticed a few Twin Daggersmen, and almost everyone noticed the Aquatans on the rooves of the houses, but most of them couldn't fight and the enemy army couldn't do anything about it because they were too busy fighting in the battle.

*Wait a minute, Mark thought, we haven't seen the enemy Aquatans with flails and grappling hooks yet. I wonder where they are.*

Suddenly, the Twin Daggersmen heard shouting and fight noises from above them. The enemy Aquatans with flails and grappling hooks had appeared! They took the friendly Aquatans by surprise and pushed a few of them off the

rooves of the houses. One of them landed on a Twin Daggerman and they both fell unconscious. The friendly Aquatans fought back, swinging their flails and hitting the enemies in the head, but the enemy Aquatans had the advantage: They had already pushed some of the friendly Aquatans off the roof before they realised they were there.

Mark ordered half of the Twin Daggermen to climb onto the rooves and help the friendly Aquatans. They were still very effective against enemies with flails, dodging the big, heavy flails and ducking under them to stab their opponents. The tide of this new battle had turned, and the rest of the Twin Daggermen ran onwards. There was no time to lose; Tom Infernos definitely knew about the battle by now.

After running through the streets for a while, the Twin Daggermen arrived at the gates of a large castle.

## **Chapter 20: Rescuing Senator Amy**

“That must be Senator Amy's castle,” said Mark, “She must be in there.”

“She's probably in the dungeons,” said Captian George, “That's the most obvious place Flashfire would keep her.”

The castle gates were open. The enemy armies must have been in such a hurry to get out that they forgot to close it. The Twin Daggermen walked into the castle and saw another large moat, but the drawbridge was down.

“Flashfire are really careless, leaving the drawbridge down

like this,” Captain George whispered as they crossed the drawbridge. There was a big keep on the other side, but there were also some steps leading down.

“Let's go that way,” Mark whispered, pointing at the steps.

The two armies crept down the steps, but they reached a door made of iron bars. It was locked.

“Oh well, good luck doesn't last forever,” said Mark, “Does anyone here know how to pick a lock?”

“I do,” said one of the Twin Daggersmen, stepping forwards. He pulled an old, rusty skeleton key out of his pocket and wiggled it around in the lock for a bit. After a while, the door opened. Surprisingly, the door didn't creak. It was a little bit rusty, but it had been cleaned recently and the metal was shiny.

The Twin Daggersmen snuck through the door and hurried down a long, dimly lit passageway, past several empty prison cells. Eventually, they arrived at a prison cell with an open door. Mark could see smoke from a Torcher's torch coming out of the room.

“Charge!” He suddenly yelled. The Twin Daggersmen charged through the cell door, three at a time. It was quite a big cell, but Flashfire had removed all of the furniture. Senator Amy was tied up in a corner and gagged, and Tom Infernos and a few of his captains were in the middle of the room. They were taken by surprise, and one of them was

stabbed in the back, falling to the floor. The others quickly spun around and set a few Twin Daggers on fire with their torches, but they soon realised they were going to lose. They were heavily outnumbered, and all of Tom Inferno's captains surrendered.

“Cowards!” Tom yelled, “Do not surrender! We must fight to the death!” But his captains didn't listen. Some of the Twin Daggers escorted them out of the room, and soon Tom was the only one standing there, in front of the Twin Daggers.

Tom stepped backwards and lowered his torch, setting Senator Amy on fire.

“What are you doing?” Mark yelled, “you're evil! How could you do this?”

The Twin Daggers charged forwards and attacked Tom. He fell to the ground, snarling like a dog. He used his torch to set one more Twin Dagger on fire. The Twin Dagger screamed, dropped his daggers and ran out of the room, looking for water to put the fire out. Then, Tom grabbed a dagger that the Twin Dagger had dropped and stabbed himself with it. He was dead.

Thinking quickly, Captain George pulled Tom's shirt off and used it to beat at the flames covering Senator Amy, putting them out. She had several burn marks on her face and body, and all the hair on the left side of her head had also been burned. However, she was still alive. Captain

George untied the ropes and pulled the gag off.

“Thank goodness you arrived in time,” said the Senator, “They were going to burn me to death. They almost did, too. I'm sorry that I believed Tom Infernos instead of believing you, and ordered my people to fight against you. A few days after we agreed to work together with Flashfire, they captured me, threatened to kill me and basically took over the Aquatan Republic.”

“That's okay,” said General Mark, “everyone makes mistakes. And I've seen and fought leaders much more horrible than Tom Infernos before.” He shuddered, remembering Emperor Shade.

“Now, let's get out of here,” said Captain George.

## **Chapter 21: The Future of the Three Countries**

The Twin Daggers ran back through the streets. Senator Amy found it too painful to walk, so a few of the Twin Daggers had to carry her. The rest of the Twin Daggers soon left them behind, shouting “The Senator is free! Tom Infernos is dead!” as loud as they could. When they got back to the main battle, they saw that the other half of the Twin Daggers and the friendly Aquatans with flails and grappling hooks had defeated the enemy Aquatans with flails and grappling hooks. They had now joined the main battle, which the two armies had almost won as well. When the soldiers on the battlefield heard the news, the enemy Aquatans and the enemy Torchers who were originally Aquatan soldiers suddenly turned against

the other Torchers. The other Torchers quickly surrendered.

There were medium casualties on both sides. More soldiers on the Flashfire side had fallen in battle, but the soldiers on the Flashfire side killed every enemy soldier they could, and the friendly soldiers tried to capture enemies or knock them unconscious where possible. The Aquatans who lived in the city were now all friendly and worked together to heal the wounded soldiers, and Senator Amy. The Aquatans who had joined the army on the way to Splasha left, since they were not needed anymore, and the members of the Twin Daggers and Venom Army who were still healthy enough to travel began the long march home.

When they got home, Emperor Larry and Emperor Peter were happy that they had won the battle. Apparently, some Flashfire spies had been discovered by the Poison Police and the Shadow Guard while the main armies were away. They were immediately arrested.

When Senator Amy was well enough to meet the two emperors, they met each other and decided that the Aquatan Republic would join the alliance with the Midnight and Poisoner Empires. The three countries also started trading, and the citizens of the two Empires discovered that Aquatan fish were extremely tasty. All of the members of Flashfire were put in jails in the Aquatan Republic, except for Tom Inferno's captains, who were put in the jail in Colourpest with Emperor Ryan. Some of the Flashfire members eventually became citizens of one of the three countries and lived normal lives, but most of them still hated the three



countries and stayed in jail. And eventually, a very long time later, when General Mark and all three leaders of the three countries were dead, the Midnight and Poisoner Empires were finally ready for change and became the Midnight and Poisoner Republics. And an extremely long time after that, billions of years after the war between the three countries, the countries united and created a new Rainbow Republic. And this new Rainbow Republic did not fall. It lasted forever, until the end of time.

**The End**