

# **The Dragon's Legacy**

A novel by

Barrie Doyle

*Book Four of "The Oak Grove Conspiracies"*

## **Prologue**

*September 3, 1809. My anger has subsided, but my determination is intact. That rogue Fred Bates has robbed me of my honor, my money, my lands and my dignity. But he will not win. I am confident that I will redeem my reputation when I meet with President Jefferson and the War Department and thence plead my case. My portfolio is filled with letters and sworn statements decrying the scurrilous lies spread by Bates. It is he, not I, who wasted money and badly administered the Louisiana Territory. It was he, not I who, as Territorial Secretary, profited from those land grant fees and trading fees. And it is he who blackened my name so that the War Department refused to reimburse me. I paid all the expense of returning the Mandan chief to his tribe. It was a heavy but legitimate expense. But based upon Bates' lies, they refused. Perfidy, thy name is Bates. But this I swear. He will be forced to answer for his criminality and his odious deeds, or my name is not Meriweather Lewis, Governor of the Louisiana Territories and who led the great Corps of Discovery across this magnificent land. For that reason, I have embarked on this riverboat for a fast journey down the Mississippi to New Orleans where I hope to obtain a schooner passage to Washington, God willing.*

**September 6, 1809.** *I wanted to throw my food over the side today, so foul is it. But I cannot afford the fineries of food any more, so I do what I did too often on our great journey: pray and express gratefulness to Almighty God for the provision of this day's sustenance, then swallow and quell the stomach's protests.*

**September 9, 1809.** *I am resolved to continue my journey to Washington despite my desperate lack of funds. This route down the Mississippi is reputed the fastest to New Orleans rather than over land. Perhaps. But it is eating into my meagre funds insatiably. The paltry meals and rough sleeping sack do not live up to the extravagant cost demanded by the Captain. But needs must.*

**September 12, 1809.** *Our trading stop at Cape Girardeau brings disturbing news. My nemesis, it seems, has sicked his dogs on me. Fergus, my assistant in the Governor's office, sent a missive warning me of such. It finally reached me at Girardeau. Perhaps overland is faster than boat after all? Bates has sent his cronies to disrupt my journey and stop it if possible. More frightening are his orders to seize my papers, including my Journal of the Corps of Discovery. Foolishly, I let Bates see a draft when he was first appointed Territorial Secretary. I wanted him to see the wonders of our journey and thus win his support if not friendship. I curse the day I let him see my additional discoveries; discoveries I resolved to show only to the President and, only if he agreed, to publish as part of the Journals. Bates appealed to my freemasonry and his supposed interest in it prompted—along with sufficient liquor, I confess—my reckless decision.*

**September 14, 1809.** *We are moving ever so slowly down the river. It meanders so much it reminds me of some of the rivers we rode during our journey. None of those were as sluggish as the Mississippi though. Time passes so slowly and even this late in the season, the humid motionless air seeps through my clothes. I yearn to jump fully clothed into the river near the*

*frequent mud and sand banks in order to cool off. But I fear the Captain would continue downriver without me.*

**September 17, 1809.** *Showing Bates the Indians' reports that white settlers mingled with the tribes many centuries ago, intrigued him greatly He asked multiple questions. I countered that I was acting on President Jefferson's personal orders to find and prove Welsh-speaking tribes in the vast western lands. I explained the long-held stories of a Welsh prince, Madoc, and his people. He scoffed, ignoring the facts I presented. In my anger, I showed him statements and the maps attested to and signed by myself and William Clark as well as the six next most senior officers in our company. It told of a great treasure brought to their lands by this prince and then left in their protection. I told him the legends that the Great Spirit brought the pale-skinned warriors to them as a blessing. The legends also told of a leader carrying the sign of a great, fearful bird—a Thunderbird or Tlanua they called it. A bird of prey with impenetrable feathers? I told Bates my conclusion that the "Tlanua" sounded to me like metal armour probably worn by Madoc's men and the sign was probably the Welsh prince's banner which would have featured a dragon. The Tlanuwas, carried a huge chest with remarkable possessions inside that no one, not even the Tlanuawas would touch for fear of instant death. Bates still scoffed, but not with the same intensity. Indeed, he even asked me to give him a copy of those records. I refused, much to his anger.*

**September 19, 1809.** *Our arrival at Memphis was a welcome break. While the flatboat unloaded and loaded and while the crew imbibed at the nearest tavern, I spent a few of my meagre remaining dollars and rented a mangy, spent horse. I rode to Fort Pickering on the bluffs hoping and praying that my friend Major Gilbert Russell was still stationed there. Praise God he was and a warm welcome I received! He'd been expecting me. We talked and drank for*

hours. At the end of our time, Gib rode down to the river with me. Along the way he warned me that questions were being asked about me in the town and along the river. Shady characters up to no-good, he described them. No question, he said, they know you are on the river and headed for New Orleans. That's how he knew I was coming. His quiet inquiries provided little else, other than the word that I was to be stopped at New Orleans and prevented from going onward to Washington. That morsel, he told me, came from a drunken sot who said too much while he was in his cups. A friendly tavern maid passed the information to him but by the time Gib arrived to question the drunk further he had disappeared into the shanty town beside the river. Gib's own inquiries confirmed that Wilkinson was leading the gang though he could not find the traitor or arrest him. I cannot believe it! James Wilkinson, a former General whose corruption and treasonous activities with the Spanish are reprehensible. It was he who told the Spanish we Clark and I were exploring the west; that knowledge endangered us many times and created great difficulties with some of the tribes. Curse the man! He has somehow tied up with that other reprobate Bates. Dogged by enemies I might be, but I will prevail! Gibs final words both strengthened and frightened me: Be aware and be wise he said bluntly, handing me an extra pistol and sword for my journey.

**September 21, 1809.** Thanks to Gib's kindness I now have enough funds now to complete the journey. His faith in me and my reputation are truly humbling. May God bless him richly for his generous loan. I am bothered by his warnings. Who, other than Bates, would know or be interested in my activities? I slept ill last night. I doubt tonight will be better.

**September 22, 1809.** If Bates and Wilkinson intend ill for me, I must not oblige them by floating naively down the river into their hands. I pounded my brains through the day. I know Bastes lusts after the governorship, but this is more intense, it seems. I have something he wants.

*It cannot be money or lands—he eliminated all that when his lies wiped out my reimbursement. No. It could only be my journal and the secrets it contained. Madoc's secrets, I called them.*

**September 25, 1809.** *I have made up my mind. Our next call is at Natchez. I am informed that there is an overland trail—dangerous say some, but I have faced greater dangers in the west. That trail—they call it Natchez Trace—leads up to Nashville. From there I will proceed through civilized country along the Cumberland Road to Washington. I prepared a will and left it with Fergus in St. Louis. I am almost out of ink and paper, so I will send this diary north to him by the fastest method. When I get to Washington, I will ask him to send it back to me. God willing, I will shake these vermin from my back, plead my cause with President Jefferson and his cabinet and thus regain my honor and financial health.*