

FROM THE BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF THE MAHABHARATA SECRET

— THE —
MAHABHARATA
QUEST
THE ALEXANDER SECRET



CHRISTOPHER C. DOYLE

westland ltd

The Mahabharata Quest:
The Alexander Secret

Christopher C. Doyle is an author who transports the reader into a fascinating world where ancient secrets buried in legends blend with science and history to create a gripping story.

Brought up as a boy on a steady diet of books ranging from classical literature to science fiction and fantasy, Christopher has been writing since his schooldays. Since childhood, his literary mentors have been Jules Verne, H G Wells, Isaac Asimov and Robert Heinlein, JRR Tolkein, Robert Jordan and Terry Brooks.

Along the way to publishing his debut novel, *The Mahabharata Secret*, Christopher pursued a career in the corporate world after graduating from St. Stephens College, Delhi with a degree in Economics and studying business management at IIM Calcutta. Over the course of his corporate career, he has worked with leading multinational organisations as a senior executive and CEO before setting up a strategic consultancy in India in partnership with a US based consulting firm.

Over the course of his corporate career, Christopher has written articles on management and business for Indian and international publications and is also a regular invited speaker for international conventions and conferences. He is a certified Executive Coach and now works with senior executives to help them achieve success and better results in their organisations.

Work aside, Christopher is a musician and lives his passion for music through his band called Mid Life Crisis, which plays classic rock.

Christopher lives in Gurgaon with his wife Sharmila, daughter Shaynaya, and two dogs, Zach and Cody.

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**The
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The Alexander
Secret**

Christopher C. Doyle


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by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying
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*The jewel, the illuminator, shone in his hand;
Khizr looked down; what he sought, he found.
That fountain appeared like silver,
Like a silver stream which strains from the middle of the rock.
Not a fountain,—which is far from this speech;
But if, verily, it were,—it was a fountain of light.
How is the star in the morning-time?
As the morning star is in the morning,—even so it was.
How is the undiminished moon at night?
So it was that it was greater than the moon.*

CANTO LXIX - ESKANDAR NAMA



Other books by Christopher C. Doyle

The Mahabharata Secret

For

Ajay Mago and Dipa Chaudhuri

For their faith in my writing

Their guidance while writing my first book

And for giving me my first break as an author.

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Finally, while I acknowledge the contribution of everyone who has supported me, I take full responsibility for all errors and omissions of fact or detail in this book.

PROLOGUE

316 BC

Gabiene, Persia, present day Iran

Eumenes lay on the bed in his prison tent and brooded on his fate. He knew he was doomed. He was a prisoner of Antigonos, the One-Eyed, with whom he had crossed swords before. This time he had been betrayed in the final battle. His own satraps had handed him over to the one-eyed general, in exchange for their baggage train which had been seized by Antigonos.

The capture of Eumenes had been celebrated publicly by Antigonos as the end of a long, bitter rivalry. But later that day, as the sun set, Antigonos had paid Eumenes a private visit.

It was then that Eumenes realised that Antigonos knew the true reason behind Alexander's determination to march to the land of the great Indus; about what Alexander had found there. And he knew what had led the great conqueror to his death just two years later.

Eumenes had first served Philip, Alexander's father, as a friend and secretary. After Philip's assassination he had been Alexander's chief secretary. It was Eumenes who had maintained the King's Journals—the royal diaries, keeping daily records of the State. But it was what Eumenes had left *out* of

the journals that was more important: a record of Alexander's true ambitions and the great secret that had made him a god.

Sixteen years earlier, Eumenes had accompanied the conqueror to the Temple of Zeus-Ammon in the Siwa Oasis, where Alexander had been told that he was the son of Zeus-Ammon. And, therefore, a God himself.

Alexander had lost no time in proclaiming his divinity and began his march further east, towards the Indus River, to the ultimate goal that would truly make him a god. The stories he had heard about the great secret that would enable him to achieve that goal drove him relentlessly forward, even as his soldiers yearned for their homes.

Eumenes had stood with Alexander outside the underground cave where the secret of the gods was hidden. But Alexander had entered the cavern alone. When he returned, his face was flushed with triumph. He had found what he came for.

Proof of Alexander's success in his secret mission came during the siege of the Mallis, during the journey back home along the Indus. Alexander had led the attack, scaling the wall using a ladder which broke and left him among the barbarians and separated from his army. So radiant was his face and so bright his armour that the barbarians had, at first, fled in fright, thinking a god had arrived in their midst! They had, however, recovered fast and charged. But Alexander had fought on with two guards by his side. Despite being struck by an arrow that lodged in his ribs, he put up a valiant stand, until the Macedonians made their way in and rescued their king.

But while the operation to extricate the arrow was under way, stories had spread in the camp that the conqueror was dead. Eumenes had waited anxiously for days outside Alexander's cabin on his boat, for news of the conqueror's health until, at last, Alexander emerged on deck, weak but alive. Whispers reached Eumenes' ears about the miracle that had saved Alexander. The

wound should have been fatal; a lot of blood had been lost. The physicians had given up – there was nothing they could do to heal the internal wounds or stem the blood loss.

But, even as they sat by helplessly, awaiting their king's death, Alexander's wound had begun to heal. The healing process was slow but it had started spontaneously. Observing Alexander's recovery, the physicians had promptly tended to him in an attempt to accelerate the healing. And in a matter of days, the conqueror had recovered, his wounds healed, and he had insisted on showing himself to his men despite his weakened state.

Eumenes did not know what to think of the rumours. But on that day, like the rest of the army, he, too, believed that Alexander was a god. Immortal. Impervious to any weapon known to man. And Eumenes knew that Alexander's visit to the cavern of the gods had a role to play in this transformation.

But now he was also convinced that, whatever the great secret that had lain in the cavern, whatever Alexander had done that night when he entered the cavern alone, it had something to do with the affliction which had left the conqueror delirious with fever, hoarse with thirst and unable to speak during his final days in Babylon. Alexander's ambition to become a god had been achieved, but ironically at the cost of his life.

Eumenes also knew that it was this secret of Alexander's that had been the reason the conqueror's body lay in death for six days without decomposing, as fresh and white as if Alexander was alive and merely sleeping.

And, now, here he was, a prisoner to one of Alexander's generals, who would surely execute him.

His only consolation was that Alexander's great secret was safe. Eumenes had faithfully recorded all of the information from Callisthenes' book, *Deeds of Alexander*. But he had removed from the official journals the portions of the book that

referred to the secret mission that Callisthenes had undertaken on behalf of Alexander, in the land of the Sogdians, before the conqueror executed the historian. He had, instead, recorded his personal account of his experience with Alexander, along with Callisthenes' mission, in his own secret journal, which he kept concealed in his tent as he campaigned.

He had also destroyed all his papers and documents before the great battle with Antigonus, denouncing his satraps as a "herd of wild beasts". The secret journal had been despatched through a trusted courier to Olympias, Alexander's mother, who was busy protecting the Macedonian throne from the ambitions of Cassander.

Antigonus would get nothing.

He drew a satisfied breath. He had done his duty by his conqueror. Antigonus, Ptolemy, Cassander – the men who were carving out Alexander's empire amongst themselves – would never know Alexander's great secret from the land of the Indus.

And neither would the rest of the world.

391 AD

Burial of a Secret

The empty wagon trundled along the lonely country road, its journey illuminated by the weak light of a half-moon. The horse trotted along, seemingly in no hurry, as if it knew that its mission was over and there was no longer any need for urgency. For the wagon had, until three days ago, carried something precious. Something valuable. Something that the world had worshipped for the last 500 years.

It was no longer safe. The new religion that had arisen in the Middle East was spreading rapidly across the world. Based on the life and death of a man called The Christ, it had reached

Egypt, where the relic had lain for over 500 years. The new converts, who called themselves Christians, after their leader whom they believed to be the Son of God, were questioning the old gods. Statues were being torn down, temples were being destroyed, and images were being defaced.

It would have been a matter of time before the tide reached the sacred spot in Alexandria where the object of worship had lain buried, undisturbed for five centuries.

It had to be protected. And the Order had taken it upon itself to discharge this responsibility. The contents of the now empty wagon had been transported from its resting place in Alexandria, across rivers and oceans — borne in boats, ships, carts and wagons that bore the symbol of the Order.

A single serpent with five heads raised as if to strike.

It had been this symbol that had kept curious eyes and inquisitive minds away from the treasure on its journey. For the symbol was feared by all who saw it. The Order was secret — no one really knew what the Order was or who its members were; or even what its origins were—but its deeds were not.

Finally, its duty complete, the wagon and its driver were making their way towards the desert. The driver, Karmal, had one last stop to make.

The wagon passed through a village, hushed and silent. Asleep. Though the silence could have equally been on account of the serpent symbol painted on the sides of the wagon.

Presently, it reached the boundary wall of a large house and entered the gates, which were open, as if Karmal's arrival were expected. At the end of the driveway stood the house, a multi-storeyed structure, built of stone and brick.

The wagon stopped before the main door of the house and Karmal dismounted. He didn't have to wait long as the door opened and a tall figure emerged, hooded and cloaked.

'Is it done?' the hooded stranger asked in deep tones.

Karmal nodded wearily. It had been a long journey and he was tired.

‘Good. Then you know what you must do.’ The man turned to go.

‘Wait,’ Karmal held out his hand.

The figure spun around, clearly surprised. ‘What is it?’

‘Keep this.’ Karmal placed something in the man’s hand and resumed his seat on the wagon. He had one final task to complete.

The man stared after Karmal as the wagon exited the gate and disappeared from view, his hand clenched tight around the metal object Karmal had handed him. Then, he hurried into the house and threw off the hood, revealing a lean face with deep-set eyes and thin lips.

He unclenched his fist and stared at the small copper capsule that lay in his palm. Then, closing his fist around it once more, he bounded up the stairs and entered a study on the first floor.

After latching the door of the study, he sat down at the desk. His face was pale and he found his hands trembling.

What had that fool Karmal done?

He knew that Karmal would not fail the Order. He would faithfully drive the wagon for a few miles and then abandon the horse to trudge deep into the desert where he would slit his own throat. For no one should know the location of the relic. The Order had decreed that, to protect it, the relic should disappear forever.

Using a knife, he carefully prised open the cap that covered one end of the capsule, and shook it over the desk.

A thin strip of vellum fell out. He groaned. Even without looking at it, he knew.

It was a map!

He quickly rolled it up and stuffed it back into the copper capsule. The Order should never get to know about the existence of this map. It was the only clue to a location that was supposed to have been secret; hidden away forever.

He contemplated destroying the map then decided against it. He was the only one who knew of its existence. It could come in useful later, if he was ever in trouble with the Order.

But the map would have to be artfully concealed in a place and manner that only he knew of. And after him, the location would stay secret.

And he knew just the place to hide the capsule away.

June 1990

St. James College, Philadelphia, USA

Mike Ashford gritted his teeth as he willed the photocopier to work faster. It was brand new, one of the latest models which could photocopy using plain paper rather than the electrostatic copiers or the wet-type plain paper machines that were in vogue earlier. Yet, it was not fast enough for his purpose.

Sweat beaded his brow as he thought back to the telephone call that he had answered two hours ago.

'Mike Ashford?' the voice on the other end of the line enquired.

'Yes. Who is this?'

'Never mind. That isn't important. Listen very carefully. I need something that you have. The papyrus documents that you discovered yesterday.'

Ashford was puzzled. He had told no one about the papyrus journals that he had found in a box in the basement of the library, apart from the faculty at the Classics Department. Had someone from the department leaked the news? That would be unlikely. Then, again, this unknown caller knew.

'What documents?' he ventured, testing the waters.

The voice grew hard. 'Don't play games with me, Ashford. I want the documents delivered to the address I will give you now. The journals should be in a sealed envelope. I don't want the papyrus

falling apart. Even if they are in relatively good condition.' The caller proceeded to dictate an address in downtown Philadelphia.

Ashford was stunned. The caller had detailed knowledge about the journals, even down to the condition of the papyrus!

'And if I refuse?' he countered. 'These journals are the property of the college. As the librarian, it is my responsibility to protect them, not pass them around to anyone who calls.'

A note of impatience entered the voice of the caller. 'Fine, then. You had your chance. You didn't take it.'

The call was abruptly disconnected, leaving Ashford listening to an engaged tone.

He would have dismissed it as a crank call had it not been for the shocking news that he received just forty-five minutes later. Carl Dunn, the faculty member from the Classics Department whom he had first spoken to about the papyrus journals, had been hit by a car as he was crossing the street in front of his house. Dunn had died on the spot. The car that mowed him down had vanished. There were no eyewitnesses so the car would remain untraceable.

An uneasy feeling took hold of Ashford as he received the news. Dunn was a good man. A deeply religious Catholic, he had fitted well into this Jesuit liberal arts college. Was his shadowy caller behind this accident? It seemed too much of a coincidence.

He now recalled the mysterious circumstances that surrounded the disappearance, two weeks ago, of Lawrence Fuller, a former Professor of Classics and Dean at the college. Fuller was returning from attending a seminar at the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago. He had checked out of his hotel and then vanished into thin air. The doorman at his hotel and the bell boy had reported seeing him into a cab but he never made it to the airport. The college had, under the terms of Fuller's employment contract, taken custody of his letters

and journals. These had been stuffed in boxes and buried in the basement without cataloguing them at the time. It was in one of these boxes that Ashford had found the papyri, while he was doing an inventory of Fuller's possessions.

Where did that leave him then? Ashford had been obstinate, turned down the caller's request. Would he be next?

Thinking swiftly, he made up his mind. He had one advantage over the caller. No one knew about the two journals he had found along with the papyri. He hadn't told Dunn or anyone else about it. Both journals were in English and one was a translation of the contents of the papyri, a fact that had been emblazoned across the first page of the journal in Fuller's handwriting. If the translation had surprised him, the second journal had left him dumbfounded. Dazed.

If the two journals together meant what he thought they did, then this discovery was more than just unearthing meaningless documents that were thousands of years old.

The future of the world could be at stake.

The copier spat out the last copy. Ashford hurriedly gathered up the papers and stapled them together. Gathering the two sets of photocopies, he stuffed them into an envelope and scrawled the recipient's address with shaking hands that revealed his state of mind. For a few moments he stared at the sealed envelope as if reconsidering his course of action.

He called his colleague, from the architecture department, who had offered to drop off the package at the FedEx office downtown. Five minutes later, the package was safely on its way to its destination.

After his colleague left with the package, Ashford slumped in his chair. He had done everything he could to ensure that he was not the only one who knew what the journals contained. He was a simple man with a strong sense of duty. Even in this situation, the thought that the journals themselves could have

been despatched to his friend had not crossed his mind. They were the property of the college and had to stay here. Like the papyrus texts. His solution had been to photocopy the journals and send them off instead.

Ashford knew what was in store for him. His mysterious caller didn't sound like the kind of person who liked being trifled with. He had no idea what to do next to protect himself. He had thought of making a run for it, but where could he go? This college had been his life for the last thirty-five years and he had not stepped out of the campus in all that time, except for the one occasion when he had attended a conference in Washington DC, in 1983. That was the time he had made his only friend outside the college, a historian from India who was speaking at the conference on the subject of preserving ancient documents. They had hit it off, surprisingly, and stayed in touch over the years. It was this friend whom he had now sent the photocopies to.

Resigned to what was to come, he closed his eyes and began praying. A devout Catholic, this was his only succour when he had problems.

The sound of footsteps approaching his office made him open his eyes. Five men entered and fanned out along the walls. He could see the bulge in their jackets indicating shoulder holsters. They were armed. Except for the one in the centre, a tall man with coal-black eyes and an intense look on his face as if he was perpetually in deep philosophical thought. He was clearly the leader of this pack.

The unarmed man's eyes alighted on the papyrus documents on Ashford's desk. 'Ah, I see you've kept them ready for me.' He made it sound as if he was appreciative, but the menacing look on his face never changed. At a gesture, one of his men picked up the papyri and carefully eased them into a leather briefcase he was carrying.

Ashford stared at them defiantly. He still had an ace up his sleeve. The two journals he had photocopied, which were now safely in a drawer in his desk.

'You have something more for me, don't you?' the leader said.

'What do you mean? I've given you the papyrus documents.' Ashford hoped he could carry this off without betraying himself. He had always been useless at lying.

'The two journals in English that you found with these documents.' His voice was hard, 'You weren't meaning to tell me about them, were you? You thought we didn't know.'

Ashford's jaw dropped open. *How did they know?* He hadn't told anyone about them.

The leader of the pack nodded and one of the men lashed out with a clenched fist. Ashford cried out in pain, as the goon's fist connected with his nose, breaking it. Blood streamed down his face.

'Search his desk.' The leader commanded. Three men swiftly rifled through the drawers. One of them found the journals and held them aloft before slipping them into the briefcase with the papyri.

The leader then leaned forward and fixed Ashford with a stare. 'You know, I was going to kill you after taking the documents. But you've just made me change my mind. I'm going to take you with us. You're going to disappear. Like old Fuller. And you're going to wish I had killed you instead.'

PRESENT DAY

DAY ONE

North of Korinos and south of Markigialos, Greece

Alice held her cellphone to her ear as she listened to the endless ring at the other end of the line. Her face betrayed her frustration and hinted at the seeds of anger being sowed as a result of multiple calls all ending with the same result.

No response.

She clicked her tongue in exasperation as the call disconnected yet again. She knew by now that she wouldn't get a call back.

Why do I even bother calling?

She stared glumly at her phone for a few moments before stuffing it into her pocket. It wasn't easy managing a relationship long distance. She had been camping here for the better part of the last twelve months as part of an international team put together by the Greek-American Archaeological Mission of Pydna. The mission was on the cusp of revealing to the world one of ancient Greece's most puzzling secrets. The long months apart had taken a toll on her relationship, culminating in an acrimonious slanging match that had taken place two weeks ago. Her boyfriend hadn't called back since then. And he hadn't picked up any of her calls either.

Bloody idiot. If he didn't have the courtesy to apologise, the least he could do was take her call so she could try and patch the relationship back together again. Unless...she pushed the unpleasant thought away with a shake of her head.

Her brooding was interrupted by an excited student, breathless from his dash through the tunnel that led to what was expected to be the discovery of the century – a tomb that had not been opened for over 2000 years. A tomb that had been the subject of much speculation for the last 150 years. The excavation team had been assisted by a contingent of over fifty students and an army of local workers, while the two co-directors of the project, a Greek and an American, were based in Thessaloniki, around 50 kilometres away via the E75 toll road.

'Alice, we've broken through to the tomb entrance!' The excitement in his voice was palpable and infectious. 'C'mon, hurry up!' The words were hardly out of his mouth than he was retracing his steps to the opening of the shaft that led to the tunnel deep below the earth.

All concerns of her boyfriend banished from her mind, Alice adjusted her backpack and turned to follow the student, her thoughts flitting back to the moment, eighteen months ago, when she had been approached to join the team.

It was ironic that she had just met her boyfriend at the time the invitation came. She had been wallowing in the wake of the incident which she never spoke of anymore. At that time, she was struggling to put it behind her, and she had finally managed to bury it deep in the recesses of her mind like a centuries-old secret. He had been such a support to her then, and she had been grateful to him for it. After dating for a couple of months, she had moved in with him – until she had been called away for this excavation. And today, when she was about to unveil one of the last great secrets of ancient Greece, it looked like he wasn't there for her anymore.

As she followed the student to the tomb, she recalled her meeting with Kurt Wallace, the billionaire philanthropist. Wallace was funding this excavation through his Wallace Archaeological Trust, an organization devoted to archaeology and the study of ancient civilisations. He was also the man behind the “Forgotten Roots” movement: a counter-evolutionary initiative of the Trust based on the five books he had authored. The common theme of the books was the hypothesis that humanity had forgotten its roots and turned to an erroneous theory based on the concept of evolution, when the true origins of humankind were hidden deep in the ancient myths of cultures across the world.

Alice had heard and read about Wallace but had never really given much thought to what her opinion was about him and his theories. But she had been blown away by the man’s intellectual capacity and his genteel, refined manner. And, of course, by the ornate trappings of his stately mansion where she had been summoned to meet him.

The meeting had lasted precisely ten minutes, and Wallace had opened the conversation by getting to the point.

‘The reason I have requested your presence on the team is because of your rich expertise, among other things, concerning the era of Alexander the Great and the years prior to and after his death,’ he began, after the formalities of greetings and asking her if she wished to be served any refreshments.

This opening remark had ignited her curiosity and she stared back at the tall figure of Wallace, standing by the window of his study, the portrait of an aristocrat with his finely cut suit, silk tie, rugged face and salt and pepper hair.

Wallace smiled at her, knowing that she’d taken the bait. ‘You see, my research team at the Trust has unearthed a clue to one of ancient Greece’s most enduring mysteries. And it has everything to do with Alexander the Great.’

He had gone on to explain the nature and purpose of the mission and the composition of the team. By the time he finished, she would have paid to sign on for this project.

'Watch your step here,' the voice of the student intruded once more on her thoughts. 'The roof of the tunnel is lower from here on.' They had scrambled down the shaft and made their way through the tunnel, aiming for the light from the portable lamps that grew stronger as they advanced.

They hurried through the tunnel as fast as they could in the beam of the student's torchlight and finally emerged in a cube shaped chamber with smooth stone walls.

Two portable LED pole lights stood in diagonally opposite corners, lighting up the little space.

'Thank you, Marco,' Alice smiled at the student, as he switched off his flashlight.

'The mother-lode, quite literally.' Damon, the other archaeologist on the team, a pudgy, black-haired man in his late forties, pointed to the entrance to the tomb that they had painstakingly excavated over the last twelve months.

Alice saw stacks of containers in the chamber. These were padded containers used to gather artefacts from excavation sites to transport them safely to labs where they could be tested, dated and examined more thoroughly. 'We're picking up stuff from here?' She was a bit taken aback. This was against standard archaeological procedure, where every artefact has to be photographed, tagged, mapped and measured to the last detail before being removed from the site.

'Orders from HQ. Our directors gave me specific instructions to remove every moveable artefact and secure them all in the dig hut,' Damon replied, studying her curiously. 'Where have you been?'

Alice shook her head, trying to keep her emotions at bay. 'I noticed that you sent everyone else away.' On their way to the

shaft entrance, they had passed the other students and workers heading the other way and she had realised that Damon was planning a private preview of the tomb.

‘I sent them off,’ he replied, grinning at her. ‘I thought you and I should have the privilege of opening this tomb by ourselves.’ He glanced at the student. ‘With a little help from Marco, of course. Lucky guy.’ He winked at Marco, who grinned back.

‘There’s no door here,’ Alice frowned. ‘All the Hellenistic tombs have doors.’

Damon shrugged. ‘Let’s find out, shall we?’ His face betrayed his anxiety. Had they laboured so hard for so many months only to be disappointed?

Alice took a deep breath. This was the moment of truth. She nodded to Damon who beckoned to Marco. The student hefted one of the pole lights and carried it through the open doorway, into the tomb. As Alice and Damon entered the tomb, he returned for the other lamp, his eyes glistening with excitement.

‘There are two chambers,’ Damon whispered. ‘Just like the other Macedonian tombs. Barrel vaulted. It’s Hellenistic alright.’

Alice found herself standing in a small antechamber, the walls covered with murals of a woman in colourful robes, commanding armies, instructing men and generally assuming the pose of a leader in charge.

She looked at Damon and saw the excitement on his face as well. They had been right about this.

‘The tomb of a queen,’ Damon breathed. ‘At last the world will see her resting place.’

Alice moved through the doorway separating the antechamber from the burial chamber within, Damon following her.

As she entered the chamber, Alice gasped. She had been prepared to find a sarcophagus, a larnax, or even a mummy. But the sight that greeted her eyes was something that made her hair stand on end.

334 B.C.

Alexander the Great begins his conquest of the Persian Empire. But his plans for everlasting glory do not end there and the young king marches towards the Ends of the Earth – the lands of the Indus – on a secret quest. It will lead him to an ancient secret concealed in the myths of the Mahabharata; a secret that is powerful enough to transform him into a god...

PRESENT DAY

In Greece, the ancient tomb of a queen is discovered; a tomb that has been an enigma for over 2000 years. In New Delhi, the Intelligence Bureau discovers unexplained corpses in a hidden lab. Vijay Singh and his friends, now members of an elite task force, are sucked into a struggle with a powerful and ruthless enemy. In a deadly race against time, they will need to solve a riddle from antiquity that will lead them to encounter shocking secrets from the past; secrets that will reveal mystifying links between ancient history, the Mahabharata and an ancient enemy with diabolical plans for a future that will hold the world to ransom...

The Quest has just begun...

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