

El Dorado Legend Snared Sir Walter Raleigh



The **lust** for gold spans all **eras**, races, and nationalities. To possess any amount of gold seems to **ignite** an **insatiable** desire to obtain more.

Through the centuries, this passion gave rise to the enduring tale of a city of gold. In the 16th and 17th centuries, Europeans believed that somewhere in the New World there was a place of immense wealth known as El Dorado. Their searches for this treasure wasted countless lives, drove at least one man to suicide, and put another man under the executioner's ax.

"El Dorado shifted geographical locations until finally it simply meant a source of untold riches somewhere in the Americas," says Jim Griffith, a folklorist in Tucson, Arizona.

But this place of immeasurable riches hasn't been found.

The origins of El Dorado lie deep in South America. And like all **enduring** legends, the tale of El Dorado contains some scraps of truth. When Spanish explorers reached South America in the early 16th century, they heard stories about a tribe of natives high in the Andes mountains in what is now Colombia. When a new chieftain rose to power, his rule began with a ceremony at

Lake Guatavita. **Accounts of** the ceremony vary, but they **consistently** say the new ruler was covered with gold dust, and that gold and precious jewels were thrown into the lake to appease a god that lived underwater.

The Spaniards started calling this golden chief El Dorado, "the gilded one." The ceremony of the gilded man supposedly ended in the late 15th century when El Dorado and his subjects were conquered by another tribe. But the Spaniards and other Europeans had found so much gold among the natives along the continent's northern coast that they believed there had to be a place of great wealth somewhere in the interior. The Spaniards didn't find El Dorado, but they did find Lake Guatavita and tried to drain it in 1545. They lowered its level enough to find hundreds of pieces of gold along the lake's edge. But the **presumed fabulous** treasure in the deeper water was beyond their reach.