

## Prologue

*November, 1862*

A layer of smoke rises and drifts across the open fields like a giant gray blanket, stinging the eyes and blurring all vision. The sun seems reluctant to throw its rays upon the horrid scene, preferring instead to hide behind an impenetrable veil of clouds.

Perhaps it is a sympathetic God who leaves the details of the gory battle hidden from view. The once-fertile land, now ravaged and burned by war, is better left unseen; the bodies, broken and dying, better left only to the imagination.

During the greater part of the afternoon, the guns blazed away, diligently executing their ghastly work. Sunset has now hushed the land, and both sides have fallen back, licking their wounds and burying their dead. Tomorrow, as soon as the sun has tinged the sky, the bloody work shall begin anew.

It's been a year and a half now, and daily, hourly, the hostile conflict claims its many victims: young men, old men—and countless others who are mere boys.

Those who wear gray recognize this sacrifice as a duty—an honorable one—but they know the carnage cannot continue for long at such a pace. The protracted duration of the war has already taken a toll on the Confederacy's vitality, causing it to be in mortal peril of exhaustion and collapse. Arms—and the men to carry them—have dwindled from a flood to a trickle.

Starved, nearly bankrupt, thousands of her best soldiers sitting in prison or killed in battle, the South has nowhere to turn.

But perhaps all is not yet lost.

In times of war, there are always those who do not hide from the terrible calamity that spreads across the land. Soldiers, of course—but others, too, who fight without the prospect of reward or even recognition.

Just such a figure has stepped forth from the shadows, blowing the smoldering embers of defiance into a bright flame. The depleted—yet dedicated—soldiers have begun to raise their heads with a newfound spirit of resistance, and to fight with revitalized strength.

Truth? Myth? Fact? Fabrication? No one is sure. Yet all are eager to embrace the Confederacy's last, great hope...the mysterious legend who has begun to tip the scales in their favor.

*The Lion of the South.*