

## Book One – The Story of Pachacuti

As the voyagers passed, they saw a group of women and young children apparently scavenging along the foreshore. They each carried a container of sorts; boxes, buckets, baskets; and occasionally one would stoop and add something to them. One of the children saw the two boats and gave a shout, clearly audible across the fifty metres of water that separated them. The whole group then stopped their gathering to watch the passage. One or two of the children waved, cautiously, but the women simply stood motionless, surrounded by an air of weary curiosity.

With their mizzen masts bare and with reefed mainsails and No. 2 jibs goosewinged on their mains, they passed under the towering Bridge of the Americas, deserted and grown mottled now with the rust flakes that it rained ceaselessly down into the canal below. Two hours earlier, as they had approached the Isla Flamenco, the harbour's outermost landmass, they had seen the hulks of two good-sized ships, beached and rusting on the mainland shore to their west, and they had seen another vessel similarly indisposed on the shores of an island the previous day as they tacked seemingly without end in the wider Gulf. Now as they entered the harbour of Balboa, they saw more of these rusting hulks, some foundered at their wharf moorings, some obviously cast adrift by weather or misdeed to strand themselves, random and incongruous, on the harbour's shoals. Unattended and unmaintained, their names and markings and any protective coatings had long been stripped away. The salts of the Pacific swirling about their hull plates and in the wind-blown spray and the moist equatorial air had so consumed their forms that none but a practised shipbuilder would deduce their original functions.

On the eastern shore, in chaotic disarray, the burnt and wind-scattered remnants of a great many dockside sheds, warehouses and other structures lay piled atop the foreshore, interspersed with an incongruity of trees and shrubs. These were buildings that must once have sheltered the commercial and administrative functions of the bustling port and inter-oceanic canal. Stacked high and wide upon an open concrete plain, like scattered pieces upon a chess board, ranks of shipping containers lay in great profusion; and varying stages of decrepitude. Towering cranes, long ago kings of the logistical game, now stood idle and rotting with rust,