



# The Court-Martial of Benedict Arnold

*Richard McMahon*

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Benedict Arnold was the most notorious traitor in American history. Entrusted with the defense of West Point by George Washington during the Revolutionary War, he attempted to surrender it to the British. The conspiracy, had it succeeded, would probably have been the death knell for the American cause. Fortunately, his treachery was discovered at the last moment. Warned of the plot's failure, Arnold just barely evaded capture and escaped to British lines.

But what if Arnold *had* been captured by the Americans and tried by court-martial for treason? What would his defense have been? Would we have learned what prompted this man, a true hero of the war's early days, to suddenly turn on his country?

In *The Court-Martial of Benedict Arnold*, America's most infamous traitor defends himself before a panel of his peers, claiming that the entire event was an enemy plot to discredit him and thus undermine the American cause. This is also the story of Joshua Thorne, a conflicted officer in the Judge Advocate General Corps, who has been given the task of defending Arnold. Thorne is depressed by the role he is required to play in prosecuting soldiers for offenses caused mainly by the failure of Congress to feed and pay them. He has started to drink heavily, and is beginning to question his loyalty to the quest for America's independence. His life is further complicated when his defense of Arnold places his love affair with Amelia Martin at risk. Amy, a school mistress and fierce patriot, detests Arnold as a traitor, and is distressed by Thorne's growing alliance with him.

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