

(The Overturned Sun)

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THE OVERTURNED SUN

FADE IN:

SUPER: DEATH AND LIFE HAVE DETERMINED APPOINTMENTS. RICHES AND HONOR DEPEND UPON HEAVEN - CHINESE PROVERB

EXT. TEMPLE DISTRICT - TENOCHTITLAN, MEXICO - NIGHT

THUNDER RUMBLES IN THE MEXICAN SKY. We slowly move forward on a lengthy tracking shot down the impressive central avenue towards a MASSIVE TEMPLE until we reach the bottom of the grand stone staircase then we follow the tracking shot up the immense steps to the very top of the grandiose structure all the way into a smaller sanctuary at the peak...

INT. TEMPLE SANCTUARY

LIGHTNING FLASHES ILLUMINATE THE DARKNESS, ACCENTING AN ALREADY TROUBLED RULER'S THOUGHTS ABOUT WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS IN STORE FOR HIM AND HIS PEOPLE.

THE OMENS ARE UNFAVORABLE.

ON MOCTEZUMA II

the *huey tlatoani* of the extensive MEXICA EMPIRE/TRIPLE ALLIANCE, sits in his chamber next to a burning fire. He is dressed up in his formal wear, complete with elaborate feathered crown and jewels. Fires burn inside pottery braziers in every corner.

ON HUEMEC

a soothsayer from the countryside. He enters the chamber dressed in his humble peasant's clothing.

MOCTEZUMA

You know why I summoned you here?

HUEMEC

The omens are bad for you, mighty feathered-ruler.

MOCTEZUMA

And this bodes ill for us all.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HUEMEC

You are frightened by these signs,  
are you not?

Moctezuma says nothing, refusing to answer.

HUEMEC (CONT'D)

It is just as well that you do not  
answer me.

MOCTEZUMA

What words have you for me, wise  
Huemec?

HUEMEC

Three times you summoned me before,  
mighty *huey tlatoani*. And three  
times did I refuse your invitation.  
But now I will offer you my  
counsel.

MOCTEZUMA

Speak your mind. What shall I do?

HUEMEC

Abandon all your luxuries, the  
flowers and the perfumes. Make  
penance and eat the same foods as  
your peasants do. Drink only  
boiled water and then, maybe then  
will I counsel you further.

MOCTEZUMA

What will all of these things do?

HUEMEC

They will appease angry  
Quetzalcoatl, who is soon to visit  
us all. The year One Reed  
approaches, the year of his return.

MOCTEZUMA

Then the omens are indeed portends  
for the future. Our mighty god  
shall descend from his throne and  
return to his people once more.

HUEMEC

Honor him, Moctezuma. Lest he  
should hold you in disfavor.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MOCTEZUMA

You think me vain and spoiled, do you not, Huemec?

HUEMEC

I think that if the ruler of his realm must ask a man such as I am, then perhaps that ruler already knows the answer.

MOCTEZUMA

A wise choice of words, from a man, such as you are. You may go.

Huemec walks away, his role fulfilled. An AZTEC PRIEST approaches Moctezuma after Huemec exits.

AZTEC PRIEST

We do not need his advice, my lord. The signs are evident for all to behold, even the fool.

MOCTEZUMA

And that is what troubles me most. I will not be the one to anger great Quetzalcoatl. We shall welcome him home to his rightful throne, instead. Let us begin preparing for his return.

EXT. SANCTUARY

Moctezuma steps out to a balcony overlooking his city, and his gargantuan empire. We see the tops of temples spread out amongst the metropolis. He inhales the fragrant nighttime air, gazes at the full moon.

EXT. SPAIN - NIGHT

We see the same moon in the same sky as Moctezuma is observing. This view is from the balcony of a modest villa in Medellín, southern Spain -- half a world away. The curtains dance in front of the moon, blown about by a welcome breeze providing temporary relief from the oppressive Spanish heat.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

ON A YOUNG HERNAN CORTÉS

lying in bed with his mistress after another sex-filled night. He is in his early twenties and full of enough swagger and daring for three men.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WOMAN

You have to leave now, my husband  
might return at any time.

CORTÉS

Nothing on earth can remove me from  
this bed at this moment.

WOMAN

Will you say this so boldly when he  
draws his sword?

CORTÉS

Let me enjoy my time with you,  
woman.

WOMAN

Then do as I say so that I might  
enjoy further times with you,  
Hernán.

CORTÉS

Very well.  
(gets up out of bed and  
starts getting dressed)  
Where are my boots?

WOMAN

Underneath the bed.

She turns over to sleep as Cortés gets dressed. WE HEAR  
footsteps coming down the hallway.

CORTÉS

(turning to the woman)  
I thought your husband wasn't back  
until morning.

WOMAN

I told you to leave before.  
(angrily)  
Now go!

Cortés puts on the last of his clothes and makes for the  
window where he exits just as the woman's HUSBAND enters the  
bedroom. The Husband sees the open window and is instantly  
suspicious.

HUSBAND

Why is the window opened?

WOMAN

I wanted some fresh air.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Her husband walks over to the window.

HUSBAND  
Did you, now?

EXT. BEDROOM

The Husband peeks out the window and we see Cortés carefully navigating his way along the edge of the roof.

HUSBAND  
(shouting)  
*Hijo de gran puta!*

The jig is up, and Cortés is unable to move any faster lest he fall down twenty feet onto the cobblestone street below. Now the husband exits the window and follows Hernán.

HUSBAND (CONT'D)  
Come back here and face me, you  
coward!

Cortés speeds up his escape but this is his undoing, loses his balance and falling to the street.

EXT. STREET

The injury is bad, but no so severe that Cortés is willing to give up and accept defeat - and somehow he gets up and limps off into the dark cover of night.

INT. BEDROOM - MORNING

Cortés wakes up to find his father MARTÍN CORTÉS sitting in a chair beside the bed. Sunlight penetrates the curtains and fills the room with its warm glow.

CORTÉS  
(surprised)  
Father.

He lifts himself up in the presence of his father.

MARTÍN CORTÉS  
They say that you are a lucky man.

Cortés lifts up the covers and realizes his leg is in a cast, broken by his fall.

CORTÉS  
My leg.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARTÍN CORTÉS

If your fall had been any worse you  
might have lost it.

CORTÉS

(trying to move)

I have to get up, my ship is  
leaving.

Martín puts his hand against his son's chest and easily  
pushes him back against the headboard.

MARTÍN CORTÉS

You are going nowhere. Ovando's  
ship has sailed without you, my  
son.

CORTÉS

How long have I been here?

MARTÍN CORTÉS

Two days.

CORTÉS

*Joder.*

MARTÍN CORTÉS

Why so disappointed, Hernán? Did  
you not think about the  
consequences of your little tryst  
with that married woman?

(angrily)

Did you believe that a man as  
important as Don Ovando would delay  
his voyage to accommodate you and  
your juvenile behavior?

CORTÉS

Then I shall depart with another  
ship.

MARTÍN CORTÉS

It will be another year before a  
ship sails to the new world.  
Somehow you must find a way of  
occupying your time wisely until  
then.

CORTÉS

So be it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MARTÍN CORTÉS

Your mother and I thought that you would study law like your honorable grandfather... but I now see this shall never come to pass.

(he gets up to leave)

You now have two choices available to you, Hernán. You can either seek your fame and glory in the Italian Wars, or you can try your luck in the colonies of the New World. *Que tenga un buen dia.*

He leaves the room and lets his disgraced son ponder his future while immobilized.

INT. CORTÉS HOME - DAY

Hernán stands before his disappointed father once again.

MARTÍN CORTÉS

Your mother and I have decided to provide you with the funds to travel to Santo Domingo... against our better judgment, of course.

CORTÉS

I thank you, father.

MARTÍN CORTÉS

This is your last chance to make something of yourself, since you can find no place in which to fit. I have arranged for you to join with Don Ovando when you arrive.

Cortés says nothing, nodding instead. He owes everything to his father's great patience.

MARTÍN CORTÉS (CONT'D)

Go with God, my son, and may you find that which you seek, or at least scratch that abominable itch you possess.

CORTÉS

I know how I must seem as a failure in your eyes, but I do have worth, and I have something to offer, if not here in Spain, then across the ocean in the new lands.

(hugs his father,  
embracing him tightly)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CORTÉS (CONT'D)

I shall make you proud of me,  
father, and someday my name shall  
be on the tongues of all Spaniards.

MARTÍN CORTÉS

Just see to it that your tongue is  
not cut out before you achieve your  
goal.

CORTÉS

I shall either dine to the sound of  
trumpets or die on the scaffold.

INT. ROYAL PALACE - NIGHT

Moctezuma sits on his throne with his nobles all around him. Soldiers enter with a group of his oracle-readers in shackles. They are pushed in front of their emperor.

MOCTEZUMA

The dreams and visions I have  
beheld these past weeks trouble me  
so and there was no one in all of  
my realm who could interpret these  
dreams. All of you, my oracle-  
readers, were powerless to  
determine the source of my visions  
and corresponding woe, so for this  
reason, I had you all imprisoned.

The priests are careful not to speak. They have no satisfactory answer for their emperor.

MOCTEZUMA (CONT'D)

One day while I was hunting I  
beheld three two-headed men before  
me, yet they did not speak. A fire  
burned down one of our temples  
whose flames could not be quenched  
by water. And the stone that was  
to be used for a new sacrificial  
altar stopped itself, proclaiming  
in a loud voice that it refused to  
enter the city, shattered the  
bridge it rested upon, and dragged  
dozens of laborers to their deaths.  
Yet again, none among you was able  
to decipher any meaning from this.  
Therefore, I no longer need you.

Moctezuma waves his hand and the soldiers grab each oracle-reader by the neck and strangle them to death before the nobles.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MOCTEZUMA (CONT'D)  
 (to the nobles)  
 You may leave now.

EXT. SHIPDECK - DAY

Cortés stands on the deck of the boat sailing across the ocean. We see the neverending blue extending all the way to the horizon.

EXT. HACIENDA - DAY

Cortés supervises the native Cubans working the fields given to him by the Spanish Crown as a colonist.

INT. DINING HALL - VELÁZQUEZ'S RESIDENCE - SANTIAGO - NIGHT

Cortés is a guest at the house of DIEGO VELÁZQUEZ DE CUÉLLAR, the royal governor of Cuba. He is a guest along with the beautiful daughters of the SUÁREZ family, newly arrived from Spain. Of the four comely young women, CATALINA is the most striking with her jet black hair and blue eyes. Catalina and her sisters are accompanied by their socially ambitious mother. Velázquez touches Cortés' arm...

GOVERNOR VELÁZQUEZ  
 I have someone I'd like you to meet, young man.  
 (escorting Cortés over to the group of women)  
 Señora Suárez, I would like to introduce you to one of our finest and most respected settlers. I present to you Hernando Cortés.

CORTÉS  
 (bowing)  
 Hernán Cortés de Monroy y Pizarro, to be precise.

SEÑORA SUÁREZ  
 I am very pleased to meet you, Don Hernando.

CORTÉS  
 Likewise, señora.

He softly kisses her hand.

SEÑORA SUÁREZ  
 And where is your family from?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CORTÉS  
Medellín, in Badajoz.

SEÑORA SUÁREZ  
That is Extremadura, correct?

CORTÉS  
Yes it is, señora.

SEÑORA SUÁREZ  
I would very much like for you to  
meet my eldest daughter, Catalina.

Catalina is not shy at all, stepping forward with her hand  
held outward for Cortés to kiss, which he does.

CATALINA  
I am enchanted, Don Hernando.

CORTÉS  
You have very beautiful eyes.

GOVERNOR VELÁZQUEZ  
Catalina is known as La Mercaida,  
because of her striking similarity  
to her gorgeous mother.

CORTÉS  
The likeness is quite evident to  
me.

GOVERNOR VELÁZQUEZ  
Young Cortesillo has been with us  
here in Cuba for several years now,  
and he is one of, if not the most  
prosperous of our colonials.

CATALINA  
This is most pleasing to know. I  
take it that you are not a married  
man, señor.

CORTÉS  
I am without a wife, yes.

CATALINA  
Also most pleasing to know.

Her mother and Velázquez giggle together, delighted by  
Catalina's frankness and joie de vivre.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CORTÉS

Then I hope I am not too presumptuous when I say that I hope we shall be seeing more of each other.

CATALINA

Not at all. I look forward to meeting you again. I understand that you have been looking after our brother, Juan.

CORTÉS

Indeed I have been.

GOVERNOR VELÁZQUEZ

I knew exactly who would be the best influence upon the young man.

CATALINA

Perhaps you can show me around the island, whenever it is most convenient for you, Don Hernando.

CORTÉS

I shall make it a priority to do so.

EXT. GOVERNOR'S HOUSE - LATER

Cortés has his hand up Catalina's dress. He drops his trousers and penetrates her, standing up, making her MOAN as he thrusts in and out of her with untold vigor.

EXT. CORTÉS'S FARM - DAY

Velázquez and Cortés walk on the large encomienda. Native Cubans toil in the fields.

GOVERNOR VELÁZQUEZ

You made quite an impression on doña Catalina the other night.

CORTÉS

I am certain of it.

GOVERNOR VELÁZQUEZ

Good. Then it shall please you to hear that she is interested in marriage. In fact, she is letting this be known all over town.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CORTÉS

Exactly what is it she is letting  
be known?

GOVERNOR VELÁZQUEZ

That you have proposed marriage to  
her.

CORTÉS

I have done no such thing.

GOVERNOR VELÁZQUEZ

Then why would she such a thing?

CORTÉS

She is a woman, governor. They say  
many things to their advantage.

GOVERNOR VELÁZQUEZ

Well, now I find myself in a  
difficult position. I have spoken  
with Catalina's mother and they are  
now beginning preparations.

CORTÉS

This is absurd, I am a young man  
still...

GOVERNOR VELÁZQUEZ

Calm down, Cortesillo. I told  
Señora Suárez that I would speak  
with you, and that you are a  
reasonable young man.

CORTÉS

It is out of the question. I do  
not wish to marry her.

Velázquez stops walking, growing serious all of the sudden...

GOVERNOR VELÁZQUEZ

Hernán, listen to me as an elder.  
This is a good thing, an honorable  
thing. It is time for you to  
settle down and contribute to the  
society I am trying to create on  
this island.

CORTÉS

I don't believe I'm understanding  
you, governor.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

GOVERNOR VELÁZQUEZ

You are going to marry Catalina Suárez. I insist.

CORTÉS

I don't think I like your tone.

GOVERNOR VELÁZQUEZ

Understand this, you ungrateful peasant. You shall do as I say as long as you reside in Cuba!

(angrily)

Have you not benefited greatly from my favor? Have you not become man of substance with land, mines and cattle? Twice you have been appointed alcalde of Santiago and I have even made you my secretary, yet this is the gratitude I receive for helping better your station in life!

CORTÉS

I am thankful for everything you have done for me.

GOVERNOR VELÁZQUEZ

Then why do you constantly disobey me? It is not only in this matter I have felt your resistance, Cortesillo. Why you have even led the group which demanded that more Indians be assigned to the settlers.

CORTÉS

Is it not the truth?

GOVERNOR VELÁZQUEZ

Imagine what your life would be like in the backwater of a place you come from in Badajoz. That is the reason you have come to the New World in the first place, isn't it? Right about now you would be drifting around Andalucia in search of half-assed adventure and the great pox.

CORTÉS

I think I shall decide my own future, governor. Now if you'll excuse me.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

GOVERNOR VELÁZQUEZ  
Have it your way, Cortesillo.

INT. JAIL CELL - SANTIAGO - NIGHT

Cortés sits inside a cramped, filthy cell, carving curse words into the wall with a rock. A guard, JUAN ESCUDERO, a man who will cross paths with Cortés again in the future approaches the cell, unlocking the metal door.

ESCUADERO  
The governor wishes to see you now.

CORTÉS  
Tell him I am busy. He can send for me later.

ESCUADERO  
You truly are a rogue, Cortés, as well as a smart-ass.

CORTÉS  
As I said, I am busy.

ESCUADERO  
Too busy for a pardon, eh?

CORTÉS  
Leave me alone, Escudero.

ESCUADERO  
I am not pulling your leg this time. You're coming with me whether you like it or not.

INT. VELÁZQUEZ'S RESIDENCE - SANTIAGO - CONTINUOUS

Cortés stands before the always disappointed Velázquez. He now detests Cortés for his wild spirit.

GOVERNOR VELÁZQUEZ  
What do you have to say for yourself this time?

CORTÉS  
Exactly the same as when I stood before you last.

GOVERNOR VELÁZQUEZ  
I remember that well. You told me that I was a flatulent imbecile who fucked goats while my subordinates watched.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CORTÉS

I was merely repeating what others have told me before.

GOVERNOR VELÁZQUEZ

In any case, you might say that I was greatly displeased and that such a description of a heinous act was spread far and wide throughout the island.

CORTÉS

It seems to be a hot topic, then.

GOVERNOR VELÁZQUEZ

Doña Suárez has seen fit to bring a lawsuit against you for promising to marry her.

CORTÉS

Men will confess to anything in order to please a woman.

GOVERNOR VELÁZQUEZ

Cortés, I despise you in every form imaginable. You are a low-born miscreant, disagreeable, undisciplined and only mildly-educated. In addition, you are completely unfit for service in his majesty's colonies as you refuse to obey orders and contribute to the general lack of morale of others.

CORTÉS

Is that all? I have a sentence to finish on my cell wall.

GOVERNOR VELÁZQUEZ

Far from it, I'm afraid. Your little dalliance with my sister-in-law is a cause of great concern for me and my family.

CORTÉS

Which sister-in-law might you be referring to, Governor?

GOVERNOR VELÁZQUEZ

(standing up)

Precisely my point, Cortés. I've recently learned of your involvement, with both of them.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

GOVERNOR VELÁZQUEZ (CONT'D)

I frown on such scandalous activity, but that goes without saying, and it is Doña Catalina who favors you the most. And as a result, I'm prepared to offer you clemency in exchange for commitment.

CORTÉS

Commitment? In what sense?

GOVERNOR VELÁZQUEZ

I am going to go against my better judgment and grant you permission to marry Catalina, God have mercy on my soul.

CORTÉS

A generous offer, Governor Velázquez. Shouldn't you consult Catalina first?

GOVERNOR VELÁZQUEZ

I already have, and she couldn't be more happier with the prospect.

Cortés is uncomfortable with the news.

CORTÉS

Very well... since I have no choice in the matter.

GOVERNOR VELÁZQUEZ

No, you do have a choice. You can either marry her and maintain some sort of respectability amongst us, or I can throw you back in jail until you are sent back to Spain for a more appropriate punishment.

CORTÉS

Will I then retain my position as alcalde of Santiago?

GOVERNOR VELÁZQUEZ

No. After your wedding I'm putting you in command of an expedition to the interior of Mexico, where you will explore and secure us a place for colonization.

CORTÉS

Mexico?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

GOVERNOR VELÁZQUEZ

With a command under the crown of Spain.

CORTÉS

I missed the first two such expeditions.

GOVERNOR VELÁZQUEZ

I am aware of this. It happened to coincide with your two incarcerations.

CORTÉS

What sort of authority shall I be given?

GOVERNOR VELÁZQUEZ

We shall discuss this in more detail after your marriage, Hernán. Until then, you are free to go about your business.

CORTÉS

I thank the governor for his willingness to forgive.

GOVERNOR VELÁZQUEZ

Still you doubt me, Cortesillo?

CORTÉS

Yet another flaw in my overall character, I suppose.

INT. CATHEDRAL - SANTIAGO - DAY

It's Hernán Cortés and Catalina's wedding day. A hundred or so people are gathered in the church as Cortés and Catalina walk down the aisle.

Catalina's voluptuous sister LEONOR eyes Cortés sensually as he passes her pew. Leonor and Cortés are an item behind both Catalina's and Velázquez's backs. She is in fact betrothed to the powerful governor.

EXT. CATHEDRAL - SANTIAGO - CONTINUOUS

Behind the church in plain sight, Cortés and Leonor kiss and cuddle. Leonor is a lusty, sensual woman, in stark contrast to her rigid and conservative older sister.

LEONOR

Why are you doing this, Hernán?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CORTÉS

It is out of my hands, my love...  
although you are not entirely, yet.

He kisses and licks her neck, fondling her well-rounded breasts.

LEONOR

Life is many times cruel to lovers,  
is it not?

CORTÉS

Life is cruel for everyone. No one  
knows this better than I, Leonor.  
Imagine being forced to marry the  
sister of the woman you truly love,  
just to appease the domineering  
governor.

LEONOR

The governor to whom your lover is  
betrothed to marry.

CORTÉS

Then truly you realize my pain and  
anguish.

LEONOR

(passionately)  
Make me forget about it.

Now they're both truly up for it. They kiss passionately and  
fall to the ground.

INT. ROYAL PALACE - NIGHT

NEZAHUALPILLI, the king of Texcoco drinks chocolate with  
Moctezuma as they discuss the strange signs recently observed  
by the Mexica.

MOCTEZUMA

I thank you for your haste in  
coming, king of Texcoco.

NEZAHUALPILLI

It is an honor to sit with you,  
great emperor.

MOCTEZUMA

Despite our past grievances, I am  
sure you wonder why I summoned you  
here.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NEZAHUALPILLI

Regardless of the reason, one does not refuse the invitation of one's master.

MOCTEZUMA

Be that as it may, I have summoned you here for your knowledge of the skies. You are regarded as the wisest astrologer in the land.

NEZAHUALPILLI

It is true that I have been blessed with the gift of reading the heavens.

MOCTEZUMA

Good, then you shall have no difficulty in explaining to your emperor the meaning of the strange occurrences as of late.

NEZAHUALPILLI

You refer to the comet that visited us recently.

MOCTEZUMA

I do. It shone most brilliantly as it passed through the sky. My nobles were greatly frightened by its presence.

NEZAHUALPILLI

The sighting of this comet means that terrible, frightful things are to come. There will be great calamities in all our lands.

MOCTEZUMA

What sort of frightful things do you speak of, Nazahualpilli?

NEZAHUALPILLI

Soon enough, great emperor, death will dominate the land. Your three allies will never win another war of flowers, and the Mexican empire will surely be destroyed.

MOCTEZUMA

My astrologers have told me no such thing.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MOCTEZUMA (CONT'D)

In fact, they have told me otherwise. They do not predict such dreadful things.

NEZAHUALPILLI

This is the vision I have seen. But if you are still reluctant to believe me, perhaps we should hold a series of ritual ball games to decide who is right in the matter.

MOCTEZUMA

And what do you wager, great king?

NEZAHUALPILLI

My kingdom against three turkeys that my advisers have predicted well.

MOCTEZUMA

I accept your offer.

EXT. BALL COURT - DAY

Two teams play their sacred ball game whereby the ball never touches the ground and is bounced off of the hips and heads. A player bounces the rubber ball off his hip and through the stone hoop to wild cheering and excitement as the Texcocans win the match.

NEZAHUALPILLI

(turning to Moctezuma)

There you have it, great Moctezuma. My men carry the day with three games to two.

MOCTEZUMA

I concede defeat. Your advisers stand in the right.

NEZAHUALPILLI

To claim victory here is an honor, only I wish the portends were not true. We all shall suffer the consequences of this sign.

MOCTEZUMA

Then it is out of our hands. Let us now enjoy the moment in which we still live.

The losers are gathered in the center of the ball court and forced onto their knees.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

A Priest comes forward and beheads them one by one -- the heavy price for losing the sacred game.

INT. GOVERNOR'S HOUSE - DAY

Cortés stands before the Governor on official business.

GOVERNOR VELÁZQUEZ  
Perhaps you're wondering why I  
summoned you here this time?

CORTÉS  
I have no idea.

GOVERNOR VELÁZQUEZ  
In truth, it is to do something  
that I know I will most likely  
regret. As you may or may not  
know, my nephew Juan de Grijalva's  
expedition to the lands east of  
here was not a success, at least  
not in my thinking. And therefore,  
I wish to send someone else with a  
bit more ambition to follow up  
where he failed me.

CORTÉS  
Now I know why I am here.

GOVERNOR VELÁZQUEZ  
I am going to send you, Cortés, the  
rascal that you are, against my  
better judgment, but you seem the  
best man for the task.

CORTÉS  
What exactly are my orders, if I  
may ask?

GOVERNOR VELÁZQUEZ  
I want you to sail to those lands  
that Grijalva has already set foot  
on and establish a potential  
settlement for me.

CORTÉS  
It is to be an expedition, or a  
conquest?

GOVERNOR VELÁZQUEZ  
That all depends on the  
circumstances.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GOVERNOR VELÁZQUEZ (CONT'D)

I cannot legally give you permission to establish any colony in the lands you might find, but of course, there are ways of circumventing even the most rigid of laws.

CORTÉS

An enticing offer.

GOVERNOR VELÁZQUEZ

Then you misunderstand me, this is not an offer, it is a command. You have been a most painful thorn in my side ever since you arrived in Santiago, and until now I have been unable to find any good use for you.

CORTÉS

And how am I to be useful to the governor?

GOVERNOR VELÁZQUEZ

You are not a timid man by any means, Cortés, and you most certainly possess an adventurous spirit. I wish you to utilize these traits in my service, and ultimately for the service of most excellent and catholic king, Carlos.

CORTÉS

What shall be my portion of the spoils?

GOVERNOR VELÁZQUEZ

That has not been determined as of yet, but I can assure you it shall be considerably more than you are accustomed to as a landowner here on our tranquil island. At any rate, it is not for me to decide, but instead this is matter for the Council of Santiago.

CORTÉS

Excellent, I shall begin preparations immediately.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

GOVERNOR VELÁZQUEZ

Then indeed I have discovered the  
right man for the job.

INT. CLOTHING STORE - DAY

Cortés stands for a fitting of several new shirts and jackets befitting his new status on the island. He takes his newfound glory seriously.

INT. CHURCH

Cortés prays before a statue of the Virgin Mary, making the sign of the cross as the *Te Deum* is being sung.

EXT. DOCKS - DAY

A line of men stand before Cortés, each of them signing up for his coming expedition. PEDRO DE ALVARADO is next in line. He is handsome, arrogant and as adventurous as they come. Quite differently than the average Spaniard, Alvarado's hair and shapely beard are both a striking reddish-blonde in color, making him appear of Nordic descent more than that of a native Iberian.

CORTÉS

Pedro de Alvarado y Contreras. How  
is that I am familiar with this  
name?

ALVARADO

We have crossed paths before, years  
ago when you first arrived on the  
island.

CORTÉS

You have several brothers, do you  
not?

ALVARADO

Five in total, and my Uncle Don  
Diego de Alvarado y Mexía de  
Sandoval. All of them capable men  
from Badajoz.

CORTÉS

You are a fellow extremeño then?

ALVARADO

I am, yes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CORTÉS

Tell me, Alvarado, what is your interest in accompanying me?

ALVARADO

I have already visited the land you seek to explore. I previously held a command in the expeditionary force of Juan de Grijalva to the place where the naturals live. I can be quite invaluable to you, Don Cortés.

CORTÉS

Indeed you may.

ALVARADO

I can also provide you with the services of an interpreter who will be quite invaluable to our cause.

CORTÉS

A Castilian, this man?

ALVARADO

On the contrary, he is one of the naturals we captured on our expedition. We named him Old Melchior.

CORTÉS

Old Melchior?

ALVARADO

He has learned sufficient Spanish to assist in communication with the naturals. He shall be of invaluable use to you, to us.

CORTÉS

Then consider yourself and your brothers comrades to this holy company.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Velázquez walks with his aide, De Lares through the middle of town discussing Cortés.

DE LARES

Don Cortés is turning out to be quite the resourceful man.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GOVERNOR VELÁZQUEZ

How do you mean?

DE LARES

He has thus far acquired the services of over two hundred able-bodied men, including Pedro de Alvarado.

GOVERNOR VELÁZQUEZ

Most impressive for him. Nothing to worry about though.

DE LARES

For the amount of supplies he has gathered, one would think he does not intend on ever returning.

GOVERNOR VELÁZQUEZ

Even a man as foolish as him would not dare disobey my orders.

DE LARES

And if he does have the audacity to do so?

GOVERNOR VELÁZQUEZ

Exactly what are you getting at?

DE LARES

His majesty might be quite displeased to discover that such a rogue as Cortés has been given free reign to represent the crown in this risky endeavor.

GOVERNOR VELÁZQUEZ

Cortés is under very specific orders from me, he wouldn't dare disobey me after incarcerating him twice.

DE LARES

Wouldn't he?

GOVERNOR VELÁZQUEZ

Everything is set in motion now. How could a replacement be found on such short notice?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

DE LARES

There are plenty of other scoundrels on the island to do your bidding correctly in place of Cortesillo, Luis de Median, for one.

GOVERNOR VELÁZQUEZ

Go to him, de Lares, on my behalf. Tell him that I shall reimburse for what he has already spent if he shall cease his preparations.

DE LARES

And if he refuses?

GOVERNOR VELÁZQUEZ

This time I shall have him hanged in the town square. You shall visit him tomorrow and give him my message.

DE LARES

I am certain you are making the right decision, governor. Cortés was always the wrong man for this expedition and would most likely make off with your fleet and your investment.

GOVERNOR VELÁZQUEZ

I have repeatedly been a most patient and kind sponsor of Cortesillo, have I not?

DE LARES

Patient and kind to a fault.

GOVERNOR VELÁZQUEZ

It is my weakness to be so genteel and understanding. But this is the mark of good breeding and nobility, you know?

Off to the side of the street, one of Cortés's recruits for the trip, CRISTÓBAL DE OLID, overhears the governor's plans and makes his way across town to inform Cortés of the news.

INT. INN - CONTINUOUS

Cortés sits at a table playing cards with GONZALO DE SANDOVAL, another new recruit, as de Olid enters. Sandoval has shoulder-length hair and a beard as blonde as can be.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He, like Alvarado, stands out amongst the other typically dark-haired Castilians.

OLID  
 Captain, I have some pressing news  
 for you.

CORTÉS  
 Yes.

OLID  
 The governor means to rescind your  
 orders and remove you from command,  
 immediately.

CORTÉS  
 Does he now?

SANDOVAL  
 We best leave at once, Cortés, he  
 can close the port if he wishes.

Cortés lays his cards down on the table, as he always does in his life.

CORTÉS  
 Who is in charge of the port?

OLID  
 His aide, Amador de Lares.

CORTÉS  
 (to Sandoval)  
 Round up the crew and all the men.  
 We leave at dawn.  
 (to Olid)  
 Come with me.

EXT. DOCKS - NIGHT

Cortés and Olid approach de Lares as he walks towards his wooden office beside the dock.

INT. OFFICE

Cortés draws his sword and pokes the tip of the blade at de Lares's chest.

CORTÉS  
 Good evening, Señor de Lares. I  
 wish to depart immediately with the  
 ships that are now ready.  
 (MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CORTÉS (CONT'D)

Would you be so kind as to register  
the vessels here and now?

Olid takes the register and sets in front of de Lares, who of course realizes he has no choice in the matter.

DE LARES

It is highly unusual to do so under  
normal circumstances, but, I feel  
obliged to fulfill your request due  
to the delicacy of the issue.

CORTÉS

Many thanks, Señor, for your...  
understanding.

De Lares dips his pen in the inkpot and shivers as he registers the fleet's vessels.

EXT. DOCKS - MORNING

The Spanish expeditionary force loads crates, barrels and bags of supplies onto the ships. The sixteen horses are loaded onboard by use of ropes and pulleys as Cortés supervises the loading of his flagship, *Santa Maria de la Concepción*, his ferocious mastiffs *Becerrillo* (little calf) and his son *Leoncillo* (little lion) stand at his side. ANTONIO DE ALAMINOS, the ship's captain and an experienced navigator, approaches Cortés.

ALAMINOS

Everything is loaded, we are ready  
to set sail.

CORTÉS

Then let us leave as soon as  
possible.

ALAMINOS

If we encounter foul weather the  
entire fleet shall make land on the  
island called Cozumel.

CORTÉS

You are the navigator. Notify the  
other pilots as such.

ALAMINOS

I have sailed these waters before,  
you know. I was with Ponce de León  
on his expedition.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CORTÉS

He never did find his fountain of youth, did he?

ALAMINOS

No, but he shall be remembered for trying.

EXT. DOCKS - LATER

Velázquez arrives at the docks alone in search of Cortés to take away his command. Cortés stands on the deck of a small boat rowing towards his command ship. He is flanked by his armed guards as he exchanges words with the irate governor.

GOVERNOR VELÁZQUEZ

How is this, my friend, that you are setting off in this way?

CORTÉS

Forgive me, but these things have all been thought about some time before they were ordered.

Velázquez is taken aback by the insubordination.

CORTÉS (CONT'D)

What are now your orders?

Velázquez says nothing, powerless before the man who is a constant thorn in his side. Cortés's boat continues rowing towards his ship, a delightful grin upon his face.

EXT. CORTÉS'S FLAGSHIP DECK

Cortés walks over to a large white flag with a blue cross upon it. He stands underneath it as it blows in the wind. A Latin inscription on the flag reads: *AMICI, SEQUAMUR CRUCEM, ET SI NOS FIDEM HABEMUS, VERE IN HOC SIGNO VINCEMUS*, meaning: Friends let us follow the cross and, if we have faith, let us conquer under this banner.

EXT. SANTIAGO BAY

The fleet sets sail into the pleasant rays of a sun-filled day.

EXT. CARIBBEAN SEA - NIGHT

The Spanish fleet is bombarded by a violent rainstorm. Many of the ships become separated from the main fleet.

EXT. COZUMEL ISLAND - DAY

Cortés and Sandoval inspect their supplies as the men unload the few ships that have safely harbored on the island.

SANDOVAL  
What do we do now?

CORTÉS  
If the others have survived they shall meet us here when they are able.

SANDOVAL  
This land seems uninhabited.

Cortés's attention is drawn to the treeline just before them.

CORTÉS  
Not entirely, Gonzalo.

Out of the jungle slowly emerges a small group of scantily-clad natives, completely fascinated by and fearful of the overdressed strangers.

CORTÉS (CONT'D)  
Magnificent.

SANDOVAL  
They are almost completely naked.

CORTÉS  
Not all of our lord's children share the same habits and culture.

He slowly approaches the natives who begin chatting away in their language. Their leader steps forward and points repeatedly towards the jungle.

SANDOVAL  
What do you think he is trying to tell us?

CORTÉS  
I do not know.

The native leader grows more excited, pointing to a path that leads to the interior.

CORTÉS (CONT'D)  
I believe he is trying to show us something.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Sandoval begins to draw his sword.

CORTÉS (CONT'D)

Halt.

SANDOVAL

We do not yet know their intentions.

CORTÉS

Do not be so quick to judge, Gonzalo.

EXT. JUNGLE - CONTINUOUS

Cortés and a force of a dozen men follow the islanders through the dense vegetation of the jungle. The islanders stop and their leader summons Cortés to join him. We see Alvarado with a group of thirty Spaniards looting and burning a small native village.

CORTÉS

Alvarado.

EXT. VILLAGE

Alvarado's men round up the villagers and hold them prisoner while the others continue their rampage. Cortés confronts Alvarado who is taking gold trinkets from the village altar.

CORTÉS

(angrily)

Alvarado!

ALVARADO

Ah, Cortés. So we did arrive before you.

CORTÉS

What is the meaning of this!

ALVARADO

(surprised)

I am quite obviously procuring supplies we might need due to our unfortunate setback.

CORTÉS

And terrorizing these harmless villagers in the process.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALVARADO

We found the village empty when we arrived. I have done nothing unusual. But terror is an unfortunate result of our needful actions, but ours is a dirty business, isn't it, boys?

CORTÉS

I do not find this as amusing as you do. This is no way to pacify a country.

ALVARADO

Pacify? Now there is a strange word to my ears.

Cortés moves in close to him so that their words are private.

CORTÉS

Alvarado, I need your loyalty and support if we are to succeed in our endeavor, but I also need you to obey my orders given my obvious authority. Let us not begin on the wrong foot, for the time shall come when you will be free to loot and kill to your heart's desire, but not right now. We shall not last very long without the support of the naturals, not their indifference and hostility.

ALVARADO

Very well.

CORTÉS

I shall not reprimand you in front of the men, but your pilot, Camacho, he disobeyed a direct order to wait for me at sea. Therefore I shall punish him in your place, understood?

ALVARADO

Yes, Captain Cortés.

CORTÉS

Now release those men and women, and give them back what's left of their possessions.

EXT. BEACH - LATER

CAMACHO the pilot is bound in chains against a post as the Spaniards built shelters near the treeline. FRIARS OLMEDO and DÍAZ conduct a mass for several men while the others busy themselves with various chores.

ALONSO PORTOCARRERO, one of the most influential of the conquistadors due to his noble family, meets with Sandoval and Cortés.

PORTOCARRERO

Camacho claims that he thought the others were lost at sea, and that is why he decided to land on the island.

SANDOVAL

He still disobeyed his orders, Alonso.

CORTÉS

What is done is done. Sandoval, go and fetch me Melchior.

EXT. VILLAGE

The cross-eyed Melchior stands with Cortés as he speaks to an elderly native.

CORTÉS

Ask him if he knows where we might seek shelter?

Melchior speaks to the man in Mayan:

MELCHIOR

He says that there are many settlements near here, all of them friendly to our kind.

CORTÉS

Our kind?

MELCHIOR

The villagers remember the others who came before you.

CORTÉS

He speaks of Grijalva's expedition. Ask him if he knows where more gold might be found.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He holds up an ornate necklace he confiscated from Alvarado. The craftsmanship is impeccable and the piece is solid gold. Melchior asks the man in Mayan:

MELCHIOR

He says among his people such pieces are common. Any of the villages nearby have the same thing.

Cortés's eyes widen as he hears the answer.

CORTÉS

Tell him we thank him, and that we shall replace all that has been stolen.

EXT. BEACH - LATER

Cortés orders a muster of his men so he can see the force he has at his disposal. Though hardly more than 500 in number, the assembled force is still impressive. The cannons FIRE off several shots that absolutely terrify the villagers. The villagers bow in reverence to the newcomers, unsure whether they are gods or mortals.

EXT. RIVER - DAY

A canoe paddles across the water filled with natives of the region. Cortés pays them no mind as they look at his men with great curiosity. One of the natives stands up and points towards the Spaniards.

CORTÉS

De Tapia, go and see what these people want.

De Tapia rides over to the riverbank and dismounts. The canoe heads for the shore right in front of him. The man keeps pointing as he leaps out of the canoe and touches land. De Tapia begins drawing his sword when the man finally speaks:

NATIVE MAN

(broken English)

God... and the Blessed... Mary of Seville. Brothers... are you... Chris-tians?

De Tapia is astonished that the native's speech is intelligible to him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DE TAPIA

Yes, we are.

NATIVE MAN

Whose sub-jects are you?

One of the men, ANGEL TINTORERO is astounded by the strange man. He wonders how he speaks their language.

TINTORERO

We are Castilians, subjects of the King of Castile.

The native man runs forward, drops to his knees and hugs De Tapia's waist.

NATIVE MAN

Thanks be to God... that I am meeting you. What day of the week is it?

DE TAPIA

Sunday.

NATIVE MAN

(softly)  
Sun-day.

DE TAPIA

Who are you? How is it that you, a Spaniard, are here like this?

NATIVE MAN

(looking up; smiling)  
Give me some wine, and I shall tell you.

EXT. SPANISH CAMP - DAY

The native man sits with Cortés and his captains at a dinner table where they all dine and discover his true identity, GERÓNIMO DE AGUILAR.

NATIVEMAN/AGUILAR

My name is Gerónimo de Aguilar, I was born in Écija in fourteen eighty-nine. In fifteen eleven the ship I was aboard struck low shoals off the coast of Santiago. Myself and twenty others took a rowboat with some food and water, then the waves eventually brought us to the shores of this country.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NATIVEMAN/AGUILAR (CONT'D)

Half of us were dead by the time we  
set foot on land.

CORTÉS

With whom were you sailing?

AGUILAR

Valdivia was our leader.

CORTÉS

I assume he is now long dead.

AGUILAR

After the natives took us captive,  
he was sacrificed, and eaten by  
them at a festival, as is their  
custom.

DE TAPIA

(making the sign of the  
cross)

*Hostia.*

FRIAR DÍAZ

God have mercy on his soul.

AGUILAR

The rest of us they kept alive, we  
were made slaves. Myself and a man  
named Gonzalo Guerrero broke free  
and escaped to a nearby village  
where we taken captive yet again.  
After eight years of hard work, and  
the mercy of our dear Lord, I  
earned my freedom.

He pulls out from under his tattered cloak a weathered and  
torn prayer book.

AGUILAR (CONT'D)

I always held the distant hope that  
one day, I might be rescued. I  
counted the days to keep my mind  
fit. But now, now this is home.

ALVARADO

There is still a Spain for you to  
return to.

AGUILAR

Spain. How foreign that world must  
be for me now.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CORTÉS

Tell us more about this strange  
land.

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

Cortés and his men are led by Aguilar towards a white-stoned temple situated between two large, thick trees. The Spaniards pull away the thick vegetation until we see a blood soaked altar, decorated with flowers and various foods.

CORTÉS

(making the sign of the  
cross)

Dear God in heaven.

The men also make the signs of the cross on their chests in response to such a horrible sight.

FRIAR OLMEDO

Truly these people are savages,  
unfit for the civilized world.

CORTÉS

This is where you are wrong. Our  
blessed Lord has sent us here to  
convert them to the true faith,  
that they might turn their back  
upon such vile practices.

The Friar kneels down and begins praying aloud.

FRIAR OLMEDO

May the Blessed Virgin protect us  
from our enemies, and may we live  
to see them know the true and holy  
faith.

ALVARADO

So now we know what we are up  
against.

CORTÉS

This seems to be part of their  
religion, that doesn't necessarily  
make them fearsome warriors.

ALVARADO

Even so, I would not wish to be  
their prisoner of war.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He grabs a handful of branches and pulls them back where we see a dozen BLOODY HEARTS atop a small stone altar. The Spaniards are repulsed by the barbarity before them.

CORTÉS

This is why we are here. We shall convert them, and make them god-fearing subjects of our most holy and catholic king.

EXT. RIVER - DAY

The Spaniards row down the river as they explore this foreign land. The rowboats flank the larger caravels. Alvarado's boat pulls alongside the riverbank and he gets out. Cortés's boat pulls up just behind. Sandoval's attention is drawn away towards the river.

SANDOVAL

Look there, Captain.

EXT. RIVER

We see several canoes filled with natives, THE TABASCANS, their bodies painted in ochre and red, many of them wearing elaborate feathered headdresses.

EXT. RIVERBANK

CORTÉS

Who are they, Aguilar?

AGUILAR

They look like Tabscans, a very powerful tribe in these parts.

CORTÉS

Are they friendly?

AGUILAR

We are soon to find out.

The canoes slow down and the warriors stand up with their bows drawn, arrows aimed at the Spaniards.

CORTÉS

(to his men)

Stay your weapons, comrades.

The TABASCAN CHIEF points at Cortés, whom he rightly assumes is the leader. He speaks in Chontal Mayan.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CORTÉS (CONT'D)  
 (to Aguilar)  
 Do you understand him?

AGUILAR  
 Yes.

Aguilar answers the Tabascan in Mayan.

CORTÉS  
 Tell them we do not wish to fight.

AGUILAR  
 Neither do they, but we have  
 trespassed upon their land. They  
 sense that you are a threat to  
 them.

Now other Tabascans appear as they slowly exit the cover of foliage, spears and bows at the ready. They easily outnumber the Spaniards three to one.

CORTÉS  
 Tell them we come in peace, and  
 that we only wish to trade goods  
 for food and obtain some water.

Aguilar repeats this in Chontal Mayan. The Tabascans shout back at Aguilar in Mayan:

AGUILAR  
 They say we should not attempt to  
 land, and that if we advance past  
 those palm trees, we shall be  
 killed.

CORTÉS  
 Tell them we intend to pay a fair  
 price for whatever they provide.

Aguilar repeats this in Mayan, then the Tabascan answers him.

AGUILAR  
 They say that we should wait until  
 the morning so they can consult  
 their chiefs.

CORTÉS  
 Very well. Tomorrow it shall be.

The Tabascans slowly fade back into the dense backdrop of jungle, as silently as they first appeared. The canoes push off the bank and row downstream.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

AGUILAR

Shall we camp here tonight?

CORTÉS

And expose ourselves to an ambush?  
Of course not.

(to Alvarado and Lugo)

Gather your men and follow them  
back to their village.

AGUILAR

Follow them, captain?

CORTÉS

Indeed. You have much to learn  
about me, Aguilar. You have lived  
among these people far too long,  
and have forgotten your duty as a  
Christian.

AGUILAR

What duty is that?

CORTÉS

To spread the Holy Church  
throughout the world, and bring the  
heathen nations under the rule of  
our most Catholic majesty, Carlos.

AGUILAR

He is not my king.

CORTÉS

You are still a subject of the  
Spanish Crown.

AGUILAR

Your world is no longer mine,  
captain. I have been transformed  
by this place, and the peoples  
within it.

CORTÉS

Suit yourself. But you are still  
coming with us. I still require  
your invaluable use.

EXT. RIVER

The Spaniards advance upriver in their boats, the Tabscans completely unaware that they are being followed. In the distance we see the Tabascan village hugging the riverbank.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The Tabascans pull their canoes onto the shore with the news of the strange foreigners they spotted. They talk a mile a minute with one another as they alert their kinsmen to the threat. Now the Spaniards arrive.

EXT. TABSCAN VILLAGE

Cortés and his men leap ashore without warning and draw their weapons. At first they have difficulty wading through the muddy shore. The Tabascans see them and give out a SHRIEKING WARCRY to alert the village. The Tabascans attack the Spanish with a wave of arrows which they repel with their shields and armor. Then the Spaniards attack, easily killing the Tabascans with their superior iron weapons.

ON ALVARADO AND LUGO

now arriving on the scene with their men from the rear of the village. Riding in on their horses, which the Tabascans have never seen before, they easily overpower and kill anyone in their path. The harquebusiers FIRE into the crowds, frightening the warriors with the SOUND of their volleys as much as their lethality.

Melchior removes his Spanish clothing out of sight from his foreign masters. He hangs the clothes on a low-lying tree limb then joins his people's retreat to safety.

The Tabascans retreat into the jungle with their families. The Spaniards emerge victorious with no casualties and few injuries. The Spanish chase the remaining Tabascans into the jungle before stopping to regroup. Cortés, accompanied by the king's notary DIEGO DE GOODY, walks over to a large Ceiba tree situated in the village center and cuts three slashes into the trunk with his sword. Goody serves as witness to the act.

CORTÉS

In his majesty's name!

He holds his sword in the air. The three slashes symbolize his taking of the land for the Spanish Crown. The soldiers gather around him shouting "*Viva El Rey y Cortés*"! Velázquez de León and the others 'Velazquistas', loyal to the governor do not join in with the cheering.

GODOY

Very good, Captain Cortés. His majesty shall indeed be pleased.

CORTÉS

This is only the beginning.

EXT. CLEARING - LATER

Cortés sits atop his horse as the defeated Tabascan chiefs stand before him. They recoil in fear every time the stallions exhale or stomp their hooves. Cortés notices this and spurs his mount to hoof the ground every so often for further intimidation.

CORTÉS

Aguilar, I wish you to ask them three things. Firstly, where are the mines for gold and silver?

Aguilar begins translating for the chief in Nahuatl:

CORTÉS (CONT'D)

Why have they denied me the friendship which they offered to Grijalva? And thirdly, why have so many of their warriors fled from so few of ours?

The Tabscan Chief gives his response while Aguilar awaits to communicate it to the patient Cortés.

AGUILAR

He says his people have no mines because they have no interest in gold. As for their fear, he says the horses mouth mouths frightened them and that our swords dazzled them.

CORTÉS

But he has not answered the question of why I, Cortés, have been treated in such a way that battle was necessary. We come as friends wishing to trade goods with them.

AGUILAR

He told me that Grijalva's force was far smaller than ours, and that he like us was more interested in gold than food.

CORTÉS

I do not believe that they have no gold.

Aguilar ask the Chief again about the gold in Mayan:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TABASCAN CHIEF  
 (pointing to the  
 northwest)  
 Culua, Mexico, Mexico.

CORTÉS  
 What is he saying?

AGUILAR  
 Mexico, this is a place I have  
 heard of, northwest of here.

CORTÉS  
 Is it a city?

AGUILAR  
 It is a people, and an empire.

CORTÉS  
 An empire?

The Chief says something more about Mexico:

AGUILAR  
 He says that they are the masters  
 of all this land and that they are  
 to be greatly feared.

CORTÉS  
 Is that all?

AGUILAR  
 He says that we shall find all the  
 gold we require among them.

CORTÉS  
 Tell him he may go in peace, and  
 that I, like my Lord and Savior, am  
 merciful in nature.

Aguilar translates this and the Chiefs depart with their  
 entourage.

ALVARADO  
 Mexico... I like the sound of this  
 place.

CORTÉS  
 We shall camp here for the night.

EXT. SPANISH CAMP - MORNING

A Tabascan embassy arrives with food, blankets and jewels as gifts for the Spaniards. The chiefs come one by one and touch the ground with their right hand, then kissing that hand and holding it up towards the sky, a gesture of respect among all native tribes. The HEAD CHIEF speaks in Mayan with Aguilar, who then turns to Cortés:

AGUILAR

He asks permission to bury and burn their dead before their bodies are devoured by the pumas and rodents of this land.

CORTÉS

I grant him permission to do so.  
(Aguilar relays the message)  
Tell him I wish for Melchior to be handed over to me.

Aguilar tells the chief in Mayan, who quickly responds:

AGUILAR

He regrets that this request is now impossible as Melchior has been sacrificed as atonement for their defeat to us due to his ill advice.

CORTÉS

Very well, then has received his just reward.

Alvarado makes a display of the horses by guiding his stallion over to one of the mares. The stallion picks up on her scent and stands on its hind legs, NEIGHING and SNORTING with lusty vigor. The frightened chiefs back away in terror. Cortés walks over to the stallion and acts as if he is talking to the horse, then puts his ear against its snout.

CORTÉS (CONT'D)

Aguilar, tell them that I have spoken the beasts, and it was indeed angry, but I have now appeased it with my wise words in their favor.

Aguilar repeats the message to the chiefs. One of the chieftains waves his hand and TWENTY WOMEN walk over to the Spaniards.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CORTÉS (CONT'D)

What is all this, Aguilar?

AGUILAR

He is making a gift of these women to you and your men.

CORTÉS

How very generous. What are we to do with these women?

AGUILAR

Whatever Cortés wishes. You are the victor in battle. They were slaves to the chief, and now they are your slaves.

CORTÉS

The men shall be pleased, no doubt.

He and his Holy Company finish packing their gear and mount their horses as they continue their inland expedition. The slave women march at the back with the African and Cuban porters.

EXT. JUNGLE

The ever-expanding Spanish contingent winds its way through the dense foliage of the Mexican interior.

EXT. SPANISH CAMP - NIGHT

Cortés and Aguilar sit next to the campfire.

CORTÉS

Tell me what you know about these naturales?

AGUILAR

Even these people say that they are not originally from this land. They too were once strangers here.

CORTÉS

From where did they come?

AGUILAR

Their legends say that they came from a place called Aztlán, and that this was a supreme land of plenty.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

AGUILAR (CONT'D)

Since they have no system of writing, everything has been passed down orally over the centuries.

CORTÉS

Then that is a great weakness we can exploit.

AGUILAR

What are you planning to do?

CORTÉS

I wish to explore further into the interior of this land. I have heard wondrous tales of its mighty emperor who resides in a palace of gold.

AGUILAR

You have heard of the Mexica then?

CORTÉS

All of the other peoples here are very fearful of them. They are spoken of with great reverence.

AGUILAR

And rightly so.

CORTÉS

How powerful are they?

AGUILAR

They are a mighty tribe and have oppressed all those over which they rule. They are also a cruel and bloodthirsty people.

CORTÉS

This does not concern me greatly.

AGUILAR

Yes, I can see in your eyes that you are a fearless man.

CORTÉS

I am fearless because we are Christians, brother. We have the Blessed Virgin and Saint James both fighting for our cause. And San Pedro is my personal saint ever since he saved me from death in my infancy.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CORTÉS (CONT'D)  
 (gets up, patting Aguilar  
 on the back)  
 Get some rest, Aguilar, you are not  
 going home just yet.

As Cortés walks through the camp he sees Malinalli sitting beside another fire, carefully combing her long black hair. He takes a long notice of her. Friar Díaz approaches from the distance...

FRIAR DÍAZ  
 Might I have a word in private with  
 you, captain?

CORTÉS  
 Concerning what?

His attention is still fixated on Malinalli.

FRIAR DÍAZ  
 I feel I must voice my opinion  
 about your recent actions.

Now Cortés pays attention. He pulls the friar aside away from the other men.

CORTÉS  
 What is it?

FRIAR DÍAZ  
 Governor Velázquez said nothing in  
 his orders about starting a  
 settlement. Therefore, what you  
 are doing here is against the law.

CORTÉS  
 Exactly whose law is it that I am  
 breaking?

FRIAR DÍAZ  
 His majesty, the king of Spain.

CORTÉS  
 Well, Brother Díaz, our blessed  
 regent is not present here with us  
 in this strange land, nor is the  
 honorable Governor Velázquez. And  
 my orders were to convert the  
 naturals here to our holy faith and  
 provide his majesty with more  
 vassals and gold than he already  
 possesses. And this is precisely  
 what I intend to do.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

FRIAR DÍAZ

At your own peril, Captain Cortés.

CORTÉS

At everyone's peril, brother. Tell me, why did you sign on for this expedition if you knew the potential dangers that lie ahead?

FRIAR DÍAZ

I am here to bring more souls to Christ, and to further the dominion of the Holy Church.

CORTÉS

Ah, then we are not at odds, Díaz, for I duly intend on delivering into your hands an untold number of heathen souls to convert.

FRIAR DÍAZ

In that case, may Saint Peter and Saint James bless you in your good work.

EXT. SPANISH CAMP - DAY

While the Spaniards carry on their business at the camp, a group of new natives appear peacefully from the jungle. Aguilar walks over and speaks with them, but they do not understand Mayan. Their chief is TENDILE, who is dressed in an elaborate feathered costume. He responds to Aguilar in Nahuatl, the language of the Mexican valley. Cortés arrives now with Alvarado and Sandoval at his side.

CORTÉS

What do they want?

AGUILAR

I do not know. I cannot understand them.

CORTÉS

How different can their language be?

AGUILAR

I have never heard this spoken before, and I cannot comprehend a word of it.

Malinalli sets down the tortillas she is making by hand and begins speaking with the Tendile in Nahuatl.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SANDOVAL

I think we have our answer.

He points to Malinalli who is chatting away with Tendile.

AGUILAR

The slave girl knows their language?

CORTÉS

Ask her what he is saying.

Aguilar speaks to Malinalli in Mayan, who then answers him back.

AGUILAR

She says he is called Tendile and he is a servant of the great monarch of the mountains named Moctezuma.

CORTÉS

Is this his land?

Malinalli tells Aguilar something:

AGUILAR

No, he comes as an ambassador of his ruler.

Several natives come forward with WOODEN CHESTS. They set them down in front of Cortés and open them up, revealing hundreds of golden objects, jewels and feathered artwork.

ALVARADO

This land is teeming with gold.

CORTÉS

(to Aguilar)

Tell him I too come as an ambassador for my monarch, Charles, across the other side of the great sea, and that my king knows of this Moctezuma, and personally wishes for me to meet the ruler of all Mexico.

AGUILAR

But no one in Spain has surely ever heard of him...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CORTÉS  
(interrupting)  
Tell him.

Aguilar relays the message to Malinalli, who then translates in Nahuatl.

AGUILAR  
He says it is not possible to meet with his Lord, but he sends these gifts instead.

CORTÉS  
(to Alvarado)  
Go and fetch my chair from my tent.

ALVARADO  
*Vale.*

CORTÉS  
Ask him when is a favorable time to meet his Great Lord, for my king is an impatient man.

Aguilar relays this through Malinalli. Tendile is angered by the suggestion, shaking his head and waving his arm in the air.

AGUILAR  
He says that what you ask is an insult for you are a mere guest in Moctezuma's land.

Alvarado returns with the ornate wooden chair.

AGUILAR (CONT'D)  
Moctezuma does not wish to meet with you just now.

Cortés presents the chair to Tendile, whose attention is fixated on the traditional iron helmet of the conquistador's that Sandoval holds under his arm. Tendile speaks first with Malinalli, who then tells Aguilar.

AGUILAR (CONT'D)  
He thanks you for the generous gift, but wishes to see the helmet of Sandoval.

CORTÉS  
(to Sandoval)  
Hand it over to him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Sandoval hands the helmet to one of Tendile's servants who then brings it over to his chief.

AGUILAR

He says that this helmet is very similar to the one that is worn by their god of war, Huitzilopochtli.

CORTÉS

Witchy-lobos?

AGUILAR

He asks if he can also take this as a gift to the Great Moctezuma.

CORTÉS

Tell him yes, if only he returns it filled with gold dust.

AGUILAR

Captain, you push to far.

CORTÉS

Tell him, Aguilar.

Aguilar speaks with Malinalli and Tendile, who nods upon hearing the request.

AGUILAR

He says it shall be done. We must wait here for several days while he returns to the court and meets with Moctezuma.

CORTÉS

Very well, we shall wait for his return.

AGUILAR

He also asks if his servants can make drawings of us and our creatures.

CORTÉS

The horses?

AGUILAR

And the cannons. They believe them to be fire-breathing creatures.

CORTÉS

As he wishes.

EXT. SPANISH CAMP - LATER

Tendile's artists sketch on parchments everything in the camp. His servants stand around Alvarado, mesmerized by his reddish-yellow hair and beard. They keep repeating "Tonatiuh" to Alvarado as they touch his long hair.

ALVARADO  
(to Aguilar)  
What are they saying?

AGUILAR  
*Tonatiuh.* It means the "sun".

ALVARADO  
And they say this because?

AGUILAR  
The color of your hair, I should think. It is also the name of the sun god... so you should feel honored.

Alvarado smiles at the natives, pleased by the meaning of his new nickname.

ALVARADO  
(smiling)  
To-na-tiuh.

The natives laugh at his bad pronunciation of the word. Alvarado joins them in laughing at himself.

ALVARADO (CONT'D)  
*Tonatiuh.*

INT. HOUSE OF SERPENTS - DAY

Moctezuma meets with his NOBLES about the Spaniards as he spends time in his wondrous zoo amongst the exotic creatures of his land.

TEOCTLAMACAZQUI  
We have received word that more of the fair-skinned ones have arrived, Great Lord. The messengers say that these men completely cover their bodies with clothes, except for their faces, which have long beards.

Moctezuma sighs, this is not the news he wants to hear.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MOCTEZUMA

Their faces are white, and their eyes like chalk.

TEOCTLAMACAZQUI

Yes, like the strange men from last year, only this time they number far more than before.

MOCTEZUMA

How many is that?

TEOCTLAMACAZQUI

Several hundred. They bring with them also many strange and fierce creatures.

MOCTEZUMA

Strange creatures, you say.

Moctezuma feeds an exotic tropical bird grains of corn from the palm of his hand. Teoctlamacazqui hands Moctezuma the detailed drawings made by the Totonacs.

MOCTEZUMA (CONT'D)

What manner of beasts are these?

TEOCTLAMACAZQUI

We do not know.

SECOND MEXICA NOBLE

It should be no difficult thing to overcome them by force. It would be a worthy sacrifice to Huitzilopochtli.

MOCTEZUMA

I find it wise not to act so hastily concerning these visitors. Where now are these fair-skinned ones?

SECOND MEXICA NOBLE

They are currently under the protection of the Totonacs. Tendile sends his blessings to you, Great Lord, and rightly awaits your counsel on how to act.

TEOCTLAMACAZQUI

We already know what they are capable of, if we are to judge them by the others who came first.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MOCTEZUMA

Yet strangely enough, they are my guests here in our land. Should I not be hospitable towards them?

TEOCTLAMACAZQUI

But the prosperity of your vast and noble empire is of more importance than the safety and security of potentially hostile foreigners.

MOCTEZUMA

They have shown no hostility towards us.

SECOND MEXICA NOBLE

They have burned several villages of our enemies, Great Lord. They wage war against all who oppose them.

MOCTEZUMA

So they battle my enemies? Interesting. This then makes them allies.

TEOCTLAMACAZQUI

Yet they are not your vassals, Great Emperor. They seek that which they might take by force.

He shows Moctezuma the iron helmet given to Tendile by Cortés.

TEOCTLAMACAZQUI (CONT'D)

Their leader demanded of your servant, Tendile, to return this helmet filled with gold dust.

Moctezuma takes the helmet and examines it.

MOCTEZUMA

Gold dust. Is that all?

TEOCTLAMACAZQUI

What they ask for now, shall they not resolve to take?

MOCTEZUMA

(downcast; saddened)  
We cannot know.  
(staring at the helmet)  
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

MOCTEZUMA (CONT'D)

Strange how similar it is to the  
headdress of Huitzilopochtli.

SECOND MEXICA NOBLE

We should send emissaries to the  
Totonacs and let them report what  
they find. Only then can his  
Lordship be certain of their  
motives.

TEOCTLAMACAZQUI

In the meantime I suggest that you  
leave the city until you decide  
which course of action to take.

MOCTEZUMA

And where shall I go?

SECOND MEXICA NOBLE

Perhaps it would be wise to retire  
to the House Of Maize.

MOCTEZUMA

Cincalco would be nice. The  
flowers and Huemac shall give me  
solace.

TEOCTLAMACAZQUI

The fair-skinned ones would never  
find you there, Great Lord.

MOCTEZUMA

And what of my people? They shall  
be without their emperor.

TEOCTLAMACAZQUI

Your nobles shall reside over the  
people in your stead.

Moctezuma grows suddenly solemn and serious, as if a great  
depression has overcome him.

MOCTEZUMA

(to Teoctlamacazqui)

I ask you to care for my children  
after my death.

TEOCTLAMACAZQUI

My Lord?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

MOCTEZUMA

All of us will die at the hands of the new gods, and those who survive will be will be their slaves and vassals. They are the ones to reign now, and I shall be the last ruler of this land. Even if some of our relations and descendants survive, they will be subordinates, like mere tax gatherers.

TEOCTLAMACAZQUI

Do not speak in such a way, Great Lord.

MOCTEZUMA

I want you to go to the strangers as my emissary. I must know whether or not he is Quetzalcoatl returned to take his throne.

TEOCTLAMACAZQUI

If this is what you wish.

MOCTEZUMA

Go, and do not delay. Make reverence to our lord, tell him that his lieutenant Moctezuma has sent you here. Here is what he gives you in honor of your arrival in your home in Mexico.

TEOCTLAMACAZQUI

I shall leave at once.

As he turns to leave, Moctezuma touches his arm, holding him back.

MOCTEZUMA

Discover, with absolute certainty, if he really is the one that our ancestors call Quetzalcoatl. If he is, greet him and give him these presents from me. You must order the governor of Cuertlaxtlan to provide him with all kinds of food, cooked birds and game. Notice very carefully if he eats or not. If he eats and drinks what you give him, he is surely Quetzalcoatl, as he will be shown to be familiar with our food... then tell him to allow me to die.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

MOCTEZUMA (CONT'D)

Tell him that after my death, he will be welcome to come here and take possession of his kingdom, as it is rightly his. But let him allow me to end my days here, then he can return to enjoy what is his. If by chance, he does not like the food which you have given him, and if he is desirous of eating human flesh, and would like to eat you, allow yourself to be eaten, and I assure you that I will look after your wife, relations and children.

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

The Spaniards trudge along a narrow jungle path through a dense and ancient forest.

EXT. HOUSE OF SERPENTS - DAY

Teoctlamacazqui and the Mexica Nobleman walk down the massive steps of the temple.

SECOND MEXICA NOBLE

What if these strangers were to garner support from our enemies, not to mention our own client states?

TEOCTLAMACAZQUI

They would not dare rise up against our emperor. They are far too familiar with the consequences of such foolish actions.

SECOND MEXICA NOBLE

Do not be so certain, *tlillan-calqui*. The influence of the white-skinned visitors cannot be underestimated. Look how our mighty emperor trembles in fear at the very mention of their appearance.

TEOCTLAMACAZQUI

That is why I am personally going to Cuetlaxtlan, I shall see for myself if they be men, or indeed, gods.

EXT. BEACH - LATER

Nine of the fleet's ships are grounded on the beach with their anchors dropped in the sand. The men take the food, weapons, the portable altars and religious statues off the ships and back to the camp as Cortés looks on. In front of the ships the friars Olmedo and Díaz pray on their knees as other soldiers break apart the hulls of the boats.

ALVARADO

Are you certain you know what  
you're doing?

CORTÉS

I have never been more resolute  
about anything in my life. Now all  
means of retreat have been severed.  
We must either conquer or die.

ALVARADO

There shall be no turning back now,  
for any of us.

CORTÉS

It is the will of our holy lord and  
savior that we press onward to this  
Tenochtitlan and fulfill our  
destiny.

ALVARADO

Our destiny, or yours, Cortés?

Huge flames engulf the nine ships as the sun sets on the distant horizon. The Spaniards are all well and truly alone in the New World.

EXT. MOUNTAINS - DAY

The Spaniards march upwards through a high mountain pass.

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

The Spaniards receive Mass in a clearing, all of them on their knees as they take communion.

INT. TEMPLO MAYOR - TENOCHTITLAN - NIGHT

Moctezuma is surrounded by priests who burn incense and cover their emperor in the smoke.

## INT. SUPREME COUNCIL CHAMBER - NIGHT

Moctezuma meets with his brother Cuitlahuac and his nephew CACAMA.

CUITLÁHUAC

As we had feared, my brother, the foreigners are making their way towards us with great speed.

MOCTEZUMA

So I have heard.

CUITLÁHUAC

Our messengers inform that they shall be in Tenochtitlan within the

CACAMA

It is imperative that you act now, great Moctezuma, to whichever end you think best.

MOCTEZUMA

It is a difficult decision to make.

CACAMA

If you so choose to receive the strangers then the nobles and the council shall support you, though they think it unwise. However, if you choose against this course we should fight them every step of their way. After all, this is our land and we hold the advantage in all things.

MOCTEZUMA

I have heard your strong words, my nephew, and I too agree that we must not hide nor flee, nor show cowardice, and let us not imagine that the Mexican glory is going to perish here.

(turns and addresses all the nobles)

Indeed, we are now resolved to die in defence of Tenochtitlan.

## EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS - DAY

The Spanish caravan winds up a curving pass that steeply ascends to the high altitudes Mexico is famous for.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The Spaniards are all hunched over, having difficulty breathing in the oxygen-poor environment. They cough constantly, gasping for air -- they've never encountered conditions like this before.

The Tlascalans are suffering equally -- they have never been so far from their home before. The weather is changing dramatically. It is the first of November and the mountain climate turns freezing at night.

The army is now passing between the mighty volcanoes of Popocatepétl and Iztaccihuatl, twin mysteries of the land. Smoke rises from the snow-covered cone of Popocatepétl, throwing fear into the hearts of everyone but Cortés, who is curious to investigate the natural wonder not present in his homeland. An impressive jet-plume shoots out of Popocatepétl, reaching high into the blue sky just in front of the army.

We see the entire valley of Mexico down below, sprawling with a gigantic lake situated in the center.

INT. MOCTEZUMA'S CHAMBER - NIGHT

Moctezuma meets with the kings of Texcoco and Tecuba about the arrival of the Spaniards...

MOCTEZUMA

O mighty lords, it is fitting that the three of us should be here to receive the gods, and therefore, I wish to find solace with you and also to bid you farewell. How little did we enjoy the realms which were bequeathed to us by our ancestors. They, mighty kings and lords as they were, left this world in peace and in harmony. But woe is coming to us! How do we deserve this fate? How did we offend the gods? Who are these men who have come? Whence have they really come? Who showed them the way? There is only one remedy... we must make our hearts strong to bear what is about to happen, for they are at our gates.

Tears fall from the eyes of the two kings. The words of Moctezuma are powerful and fortuitous.

## EXT. BALCONY

Moctezuma leaves the two kings to ponder his words, walking out to the balcony overlooking a plaza. He takes a knife from his belt and cuts his shins, arms and ears -- an offering to the gods for the wisdom to lead his people and his empire in this painful time of indecision.

## EXT. SPANISH CAMP - NIGHT

The Spaniards sit by the light of their fires, eating and drinking before their final march towards Tenochtitlan in the morning.

## INT. PRIVATE TEMPLE - CONTINUOUS

Moctezuma kneels before a statue of Huitzilopochtli, blood dripping from his earlobes, his forearms and his shins. He holds out his hands as he awaits the will of his war god.

## EXT. MOUNTAINS - DAY

Cortés halts the army with a wave of his hand. WE SEE down below in the center of an enormous lake the absolutely magical Tenochtitlan, largest city in the western hemisphere.

CORTÉS

How marvelous is this.

ALVARADO

You have actually done it, Hernando. You've made good on your promise.

CORTÉS

One hundred fold, Alvarado. Imagine the riches and glory that await us down there in that valley.

## INT. MOCTEZUMA'S CHAMBER

Moctezuma's servants begin the elaborate ritual of dressing their emperor. Each piece of clothing and accessory is handled by an individual servant. He stands nude atop a pedestal and the dressing begins by wrapping a linen kilt around his waist.

## EXT. MOUNTAINS

The Spaniards are gathered at a large stream where they bathe before they make their descent. Others clean their armor and helmets.

## INT. MOCTEZUMA'S CHAMBER

An elaborate feathered headdress is carefully placed upon Moctezuma's head. Incense burns from a large golden brazier in the center of the chamber.

## EXT. MOUNTAINS

Cortés and his captains adjust their tunics and ceremonial armor in typically vain fashion.

## INT. MOCTEZUMA'S CHAMBER

Moctezuma is fully dressed in his magnificent regalia. He resembles a feathered serpent in his brightly-colored garb and priceless collection of gold, jewels and gems.

## INT. ANTECHAMBER

The Mexica nobles stand before Moctezuma in their equally exquisite costumes.

## EXT. MOUNTAINS

Cortés and his army journey down into the valley towards the Mexica capitol. We see the city resplendent in the distance.

## EXT. TEMPLE DISTRICT

Moctezuma and his entourage depart the royal palace and are flanked on both sides by the massive population of Tenochtitlan.

## EXT. CAUSEWAY - DAY

The Spanish Army marches slowly across the lengthy and narrow bridge straddling the enormous lake connecting the mainland with the city. Only three men can march side by side. The army's train extends back hundreds of yards.

The standard-bearer, walks just behind them with Cortés's blue banner with a white cross. The four captains are followed in turn by the canoneers, harqbusiers, archers, pikemen and their Indian allies last. Cortés rides at the rear with his personal staff, including Malinalli.

FRIAR OLMEDO

What are your thoughts now, Cortés?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CORTÉS

I feel as though we are reliving an episode from the days of the mighty Campeador, visiting one of the Caliphs during the reconquest.

FRIAR OLMEDO

That is quite a comparison, to be sure.

CORTÉS

Yes... although I doubt my Cid ever saw a city as splendid and magnificent as this one.

WE SEE at the other end of the causeway a large entourage approaching from the city. A great litter is being carried, inside is mighty Moctezuma himself. Accompanying the emperor are hundreds of Mexica nobles, including members of his family, and thousands of unarmed attendees. Alvarado pulls away from the others and rides to join Cortés at the rear...

ALVARADO

Any last thoughts before we plunge headlong into the abyss?

CORTÉS

We must appeal to the Blessed Virgin for help, may she guide us in all our endeavors here.

He makes the sign of the cross twice.

ALVARADO

Suit yourself, *compadre*, but I prefer my appeals to be heard by St. James.

He taps the hilt of his sword, removing it from its scabbard. Alvarado kisses the blade.

ALVARADO (CONT'D)

*Por Dios y España.*

EXT. CAUSEWAY

Moctezuma and his entourage make their way towards the strange visitors from the opposite end of the causeway. The standard-bearer moves out into the vanguard as the distance is narrowed. He alternately twirls the banner using either hand followed by throwing it up into the air and catching it as he leads the march.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The Mexica are dressed up in elaborate and colorful feathered outfits befitting their respective ranks. They are covered in priceless jewels, stones and gold. Moctezuma and his entourage stand before Cortés and his men. The Mexica lords come forward one at a time and first kiss the ground before Cortés, then kiss their own hands as they rise.

Cortés removes his shell necklace and places it around Moctezuma's neck, who returns the favor with a more elaborate one decorated with eight golden shrimp. Cortés admires the gift as Moctezuma place it around his neck, followed by another colorful garland of flowers.

It's the original Mexican standoff, the situation is tense and uncomfortable because of the language barrier. Cortés's forthright manner wins the day as he moves towards the emperor before attendants intervene and push him away.

CORTÉS

Are you not he? Are you Moctezuma?

Moctezuma speaks in Nahuatl, Malinalli quickly translating...

MALINALLI

He says, "Yes, I am he".

Moctezuma says something else quickly in Nahuatl.

CORTÉS

What is he saying?

MALINALLI

He wishes you to know that this is known as the wind necklace. It is said to have been worn by their god Quetzlcoatl himself.

CORTÉS

Tell him I thank him greatly, and that we are his friends.

MOCTEZUMA

(in Nahuatl)

You are weary. The journey has tired you. But now you have arrived, rest now...

CORTÉS

Let Moctezuma put his heart at ease. Let him not be frightened for we love him much. Now are hearts are indeed satisfied, for we know him, we hear him.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CORTÉS (CONT'D)

For a long time we have wished to see him, to look upon his face, and this we have seen. Already we have come to his home in Mexico. At leisure he shall hear our words.

Moctezuma cracks a smile then motions for his litter. His servants lift him back onto the litter and take him away. Cacama motions to Cortés to follow the entourage into the city. He speaks with Malinalli in Nahuatl...

MALINALLI

Now it is time for us to enter the city.

INT. MOCTEZUMA'S RECEPTION HALL - LATER

Cortés and his captains, Malinalli, Aguilar and the friars Olmedo and Díaz stand before Moctezuma and his court.

MOCTEZUMA

You have graciously come on earth, you have graciously approached your water, your high place of Mexico. You have come down to your mat, your throne, which I have briefly kept for you, I who used to keep it for you.

(beat)

You have graciously arrived, you have known pain, you have known weariness. Now come on earth and take your rest, enter into your palace, rest your limbs. May our lords come on earth.

He motions for Cortés to come forward and sit on his throne. Moctezuma gets up and vacates his own throne as Cortés sits down.

INT. HOUSE OF AXAYACATL - LATER

The Mexica attendees escort Cortés and his captains into the place of Moctezuma's late father.

ALVARADO

So this is to be our home now.

SANDOVAL

*Aquí es su casa.*

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALVARADO

(to Cortés)

Have you noticed what a maze this district is they are housing us in? It is an absolute labyrinth.

CORTÉS

I want men stationed at all strategic points. If our situation should change dramatically I wish to have options.

SANDOVAL

I'll see to it, captain.

CORTÉS

Have the men settled in yet?

ALVARADO

Reasonably so. They have also provided us with cooks and servants for our day to day needs.

CORTÉS

And why shouldn't they, after all, we are ambassadors from Spain?

ALVARADO

Yes, a land they have never heard of ruled by a king they shall never meet.

Cortés detects Alvarado's sarcasm as he hints of the illegitimacy of their embassy.

CORTÉS

You feel we are deceiving the Mexica?

ALVARADO

Are we not, captain?

CORTÉS

Say what is on your mind, Alvarado.

CORTÉS (CONT'D)

We have no orders to be here and we certainly do not represent our most excellent and Christian nation. None of us has ever even met his majesty, King Charles.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CORTÉS (CONT'D)

Yet here we are, posing as ambassadors in attempt to rob some gold and steal an empire right from underneath its emperor's nose.

CORTÉS (CONT'D)

I am here by the will of God and the Virgin Mary to bring salvation to the untold souls in the part of the world, and claim this land for our king and his honor...

ALVARADO

(interrupting)

Whether he wishes it or not?

CORTÉS

You are dismissed, Pedrito.

ALVARADO

Very well.

CORTÉS

Before you go, inform the priests to gather the men and conduct a mass in the main hall. I expect everyone to be present... including you.

ALVARADO

As you wish, captain.

EXT. COURTYARD - TEMPLE OF HUITZILOPOCHTLI - LATER

Cortés and his main entourage engage in a makeshift Mass at the base of the temple, thanking God for their continued safety. Olmedo leads the service holding a wooden cross.

INT. ZOO

Cortés, Alvarado, Olmedo and others are escorted by several Mexica nobles through the wondrous collection of animals on display. The Spaniards are seeing for the first time countless varieties of mammals and birds. Pumas and bobcats, rattlesnakes and wildly-colored tropical birds amaze the visiting Europeans.

EXT. TEMPLO MAYOR

The Spaniards look on in horror yet again at the blood-covered walls inside the Temple's confines, human skulls protruding from the walls like macabre decorations.

INT. AVIARY

The Aztecs guide the Spaniards through their amazing structure -- Moctezuma's favorite place of contemplation.

EXT. COURTYARD - TEMPLE OF HUITZILOPOCHTLI - DAY

Most of the Spanish retinue and the Mexica stand at the base of the enormous pyramid. Moctezuma is reclining as usual in his litter. Cortés motions to Malinche.

CORTÉS

Tell him that we wish to visit the temple at the top.

MALINALLI

I can assure you this will not be taken kindly by the Mexica.

CORTÉS

Are you frightened of these people?

MALINALLI

(fearful)

Moctezuma is the lord of all this land and the dominions beyond it. His rule has been very cruel and merciless with my people.

CORTÉS

All the more better for you to stand among him as my interpreter.

MALINALLI

Do you not fear him?

CORTÉS

No. Only their superior numbers pose any threat to us. Soon the great emperor shall learn that he too is a vassal to my most holiest of kings, Carlos Quinto. Now go and ask him, without any fear.

Malinalli approaches Moctezuma's litter.

MALINALLI

Great Moctezuma, noble Cortés and his men wish to visit the temple of your god.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MOCTEZUMA

This is not a common request by visitors.

MALINALLI

He wishes to see how his fellow deities are honored here in your land.

MOCTEZUMA

I shall have to consult the priests before I give an answer.

(gets out of his litter  
and stands next to  
Malinalli)

Ask them to wait for me here while I ascend to speak with the priests.

MALINALLI

Very well.

Moctezuma, accompanied by his servants, begins walking up the 114 steps of the pyramid.

CORTÉS

(to Malinalli)

What was his answer?

MALINALLI

First he must ask permission from the temple priests. He thought it a most unusual request.

CORTÉS

How so? We are honored guests here, are we not?

MALINALLI

We are vastly outnumbered guests, as you have already observed. It would be unwise to make so many demands upon the emperor.

CORTÉS

Believe me when I tell you, Malinalli, as ruler he respects such forthright behavior. Any other way of acting appears weak to him, and this I can ill afford to display.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MALINALLI

I think you overconfident, and you gamble with our lives.

CORTÉS

If I never took chances I would not be standing here at this very moment.

Alvarado comes over and points to a group of priests descending the steps.

ALVARADO

I believe we have their permission.

The priests motion for them to come up. Cortés and his retinue begin the lengthy hike up the steps. The priest continue towards the Spanish, and fearful for their lives, they draw their swords.

ALVARADO (CONT'D)

Tell them to back away, Marina!

Malinche moves forward and motions for the priests to stop, which they do, confused by the Spaniards's reactions.

CORTÉS

Surely they do not intend on sacrificing us to their heathen god.

ALVARADO

I for one am not willing to give them the benefit of the doubt.

Malinalli argues with the priests and they step aside.

MALINALLI

They were sent back to escort us to the top.

CORTÉS

We do not need their help with such a task. We shall arrive on our own.

He motions to the rest and they continue their ascent.

EXT. TEMPLE MOUNT - LATER

At the top, the Spanish pant and gasp for air, covered in sweat.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MOCTEZUMA

Lord Malinche, I hope the climb did not tire you and your men.

CORTÉS

Spaniards never tire, great emperor.

MOCTEZUMA

Come, let me direct you to a better view.

He escorts them to the greatest vantage point and sweeps his arm through the air.

MOCTEZUMA (CONT'D)

Tenochtitlan.

The Spaniards are absolutely gobsmacked by the view. Hundreds of lesser temples jut upwards into the sky, roof gardens adorn all the buildings and the massive network of canals and the lakes are visible for the first time.

CORTÉS

Truly it is a breathtaking achievement.

MOCTEZUMA

Let us go inside.

INT. TEMPLE OF HUITZILOPOCHTLI

The Spaniards follow Moctezuma into the fire-lit interior where the gruesome stone image of the bejeweled Huitzilopochtli stands guard. The menacing idol is black, covered entirely by dried human blood. A statue of TEZCATILPOCA, the brother of Huitzilopochtli stands to the side, as well as another idol made from seeds and dough.

FRIAR OLMEDO

(covering his mouth with his sleeve)

How revolting.

MOCTEZUMA

Your men do not approve of Huitzilopochtli?

CORTÉS

I do not approve of this.

MOCTEZUMA

This is the way of the Mexica.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CORTÉS

If the great Moctezuma worshipped  
the one true god, even better  
fortune shall be bestowed upon him.

The frightened Olmedo tugs at Cortés's sleeve, dissuading him  
in his spiritual pursuit.

CORTÉS (CONT'D)

If it pleases you, mightn't my men  
erect a small chapel dedicated to  
our god here in the temple?

MOCTEZUMA

Why would you want do a thing like  
that?

CORTÉS

We only wish to place our cross and  
figurine of the Virgin Mary in a  
small area so that we too might  
maintain our worship.

Olmedo cowers away, fearful of Moctezuma's potential wrath.

CORTÉS (CONT'D)

In fact, if you were to allow this,  
there would be a competition  
between your idol and our one true  
god.

MOCTEZUMA

You continue to talk of your god  
even in the presence of  
Huitzilopochtli? Therefore, I  
shall have to decline the request.  
I must respect my gods, and I shall  
not allow you as our guests to  
intrude upon their sanctuary.

CORTÉS

I implore you...

MOCTEZUMA

(cutting him off)

You must leave now. I shall not  
accompany you, as in courtesy I  
should, for I must stay placate the  
gods for the indignity I have  
exposed them.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CORTÉS

And before I depart, how may I ask  
shall you placate your gods?

MOCTEZUMA

(points to  
Huitzilopochtli)

In the same way that our ancestors  
placated him.

INT. SPANISH QUARTERS - NIGHT

Cortés, Olmedo, Alvarado and Díaz eat tortillas prepared for  
them by Mexican house servants.

CORTÉS

I cannot bear to imagine the  
horrors that others shall have to  
endure for our insolence today.

FRIAR OLMEDO

You do mean, your insolence,  
Cortés.

ALVARADO

Mind your tone, friar, or we shall  
have to placate our god as well.

FRIAR OLMEDO

What sort of boorish behavior is  
this, Alvarado? You dare insult a  
servant of the church?

ALVARADO

(laughing)

Indeed I do, brother.

CORTÉS

Silence, you two! Enough damage  
has been done for the day.

ALVARADO

(to Cortés)

I think you showed that so-called  
emperor who was truly in charge.  
We have been here all of five days  
yet this Moctezuma caters to our  
every whim.

FRIAR OLMEDO

Apart from placing the Blessed  
Virgin inside their bloodthirsty  
god's temple.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALVARADO

Understandable, one should think.

CORTÉS

We must remain bold, it is true.  
However we must also proceed with  
caution as we are not only guests,  
but helpless ones too. At a single  
word Moctezuma can have us tied up  
and our hearts ripped out before  
the very same altar we saw today.  
We are lucky to be alive thus far,  
still luckier to be in the position  
we now find ourselves.

INT. TEMPLE OF HUITZILOPOCHTLI - NIGHT

Moctezuma prays on his knees before the blood-coated idol as  
WE HEAR the screams of sacrificial victims nearby.

INT. CORTES' QUARTERS

Cortés and Malinalli undress in front of the open fire in the  
center of the room.

INT. TEMPLE OF HUITZILOPOCHTLI

The Mexica Priests hold down a screaming man as another  
priest cuts open his chest and rips out his still-beating  
heart.

INT. CORTES' QUARTERS

Cortés and Malinalli make love by the open flame, writhing in  
each others arms as they share their intense passion.

INT. TEMPLE OF HUITZILOPOCHTLI

The priests splash the idol of Huitzilopochtli with the fresh  
blood of their victim while Moctezuma continues his pious  
babbling for the angry god's mercy.

INT. CORTES' QUARTERS

Malinalli sits atop Cortés as he thrusts in and out of her  
with great vigor until they both share mutual climax.

INT. TEMPLE OF HUITZILOPOCHTLI

A slow river of blood flows over the bright jeweled eyes of  
the idol until they too are no longer visible, continuing in  
rivulets down to the gaping mouth of the ghastly and  
insatiable Aztec god.

INT. HOUSE OF AXAYACATL - NIGHT

Cortés gets up out of bed. He pulls on a tunic and walks over to the far side of the room. Cortés notices a portion of the wall that has been limed over. He touches the spot with his hand, the lime is fresh, meaning it has only recently been covered. He takes a dagger from his sheath and stabs at the wall with the handle until the lime breaks open.

INT. HOUSE OF AXAYACATL

Cortés, Alvarado and Sandoval break open the newly-constructed wall with crowbars, eager to discover what lies inside. They walk down a narrow corridor leading to a larger room up ahead of them.

INT. TREASURE ROOM

We see the inside of the darkened chamber as Cortés illuminates it with a candle. A MAGNIFICENT TREASURE of untold wealth is stored inside! This is the treasure of Montezuma's late father, Axayacatl.

ALVARADO

*Hijo de gran puta.*

SANDOVAL

Is that all you can think to say at a time like this?

ALVARADO

Until you provide me with something more fitting, then, yes.

CORTÉS

It is more than we can possibly hope to carry with all of the other gifts we received.

SANDOVAL

So this is what is meant by an embarrassment of riches.

CORTÉS

This is the treasure of Axayacatl collected over the years. And there is still more from where this came from.

ALVARADO

Well, if ever I doubted you, Cortés, I now stand corrected.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CORTÉS

Let us repair the wall as it was before, otherwise our stay here may be greatly shortened.

INT. HOUSE OF AXAYACATL - DAY

Cortés pulls Alvarado aside.

CORTÉS

Again, do not speak of what we discovered last night.

ALVARADO

I shall say nothing of it.

CORTÉS

We have no idea how long we shall be in this place. That treasure I wish to send back to Spain.

ALVARADO

But how? We are completely cut off from Cuba, how much more Spain.

CORTÉS

When the time is right, we shall eventually construct new ships. We shall haul that treasure and the rest of the gold out of here unimpeded.

ALVARADO

Quite a plan, captain.

MONTAGE - DAILY LIFE IN TENOCHTITLAN

-- EXT. COURTYARD - DAY -- Cortés is teaching Moctezuma how to use a crossbow. The emperor is unable to fire it correctly.

-- INT. CHAPEL - DAY -- The Spaniards attend their daily Mass with Olmedo leading the service.

-- INT. SPANISH QUARTERS - DAY -- Moctezuma plays Mexica board games with the Spaniards. Alvarado helps him cheat by whispering in his ear, and Moctezuma wins the game.

-- EXT. LAKE TEXCOCO - DAY -- Cortés and Malinalli recline aboard a large canoe as the Mexica take them on a scenic tour of the massive lake.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

-- INT. SPANISH QUARTERS - DAY -- Mexica smiths teach Alvarado and Sandoval how to make necklaces with gold and jade.

END OF MONTAGE

INT. CORTES' QUARTERS - DAY

While sorting through maps and various other papers, Cortés comes across a letter. The letter is from PEDRO DE IRCIO, the new commander of the fort at Villa Rica.

INT. MOCTEZUMA'S RECEPTION HALL - LATER

Cortés storms in with Alvarado, Lugo and thirty others of his camp. They swiftly move past Moctezuma's guards with their swords hidden under their cloaks.

MOCTEZUMA

What is the meaning of this intrusion?

CORTÉS

I need to speak with you about a matter of great importance.

MOCTEZUMA

Come forward, then.

Cortés approaches Moctezuma's throne. He notices the dozens of women servants catering to Moctezuma's every whim throughout the hall.

CORTÉS

Tell me, Moctezuma, how many women do you keep pregnant at one time?

Moctezuma bellows out a great laugh.

MOCTEZUMA

One hundred and fifty.

CORTÉS

Very impressive.

MOCTEZUMA

Would you like one of them?  
 (points in the direction  
 of several girls)  
 I give you your choice of any you require. Perhaps one of my daughters.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CORTÉS

As a Christian I must decline. I am married and God only permits us one wife.

MOCTEZUMA

Such a pity. What was so urgent then?

Cortés pulls out De Ircio's letter from under his cloak and holds it up in front of Moctezuma.

CORTÉS

The chief of Zempoala, Qualpopoca, has taken it upon himself to slaughter my men, without provocation. I ask you now, Moctezuma, did you give the order?

MOCTEZUMA

I did no such thing.

CORTÉS

This Qualpopoca stated to other local chieftains that he had killed my men upon the orders of his great lord and eminence, Moctezuma.

MOCTEZUMA

I must insist that I have never given orders to oppose your men as you are our guests.

Cortés moves in closer to Moctezuma, whispering into his ear.

CORTÉS

I am sure myself this brazen Qualpopoca is a liar. The great and just Moctezuma would never give such an order, since he is, in fact, host to this most important embassy from the king of Spain.

Moctezuma is nervous, slow to answer.

CORTÉS (CONT'D)

(backing away)

I could never believe such a thing took place. Yet this ghastly deed has been done.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MOCTEZUMA

I shall indeed discover the truth in this matter. He shall be summoned to me immediately.

He waves his hand and noble comes forward. Moctezuma takes a sealstone from his wrist and hands it over.

MOCTEZUMA (CONT'D)

Send to the coast for Qualpopoca and bring him here to me. If he dares resist you, call upon our warriors in the nearby towns to assist you in your task.

The noble nods and leaves at once.

MOCTEZUMA (CONT'D)

Is is settled.

CORTÉS

This is all well and good but until this matter is fully resolved I insist that you come with me and stay in the palace of Axayacatl.

MOCTEZUMA

I do not understand.

CORTÉS

You shall of course be treated with the utmost courtesy by me and my countrymen, whom I assure you are grateful for your most expansive generosity.

MOCTEZUMA

You wish me to be your hostage, and that I shall have no liberty. My person is not such that it can be made a prisoner of. Even if I should consent to it, my people would never suffer it.

CORTÉS

From your father's house you shall continue to rule your empire and render your judgments as you see fit. If I were to fail in taking action in response to the murders of my Christian brothers, my king shall not excuse my lack of initiative.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

CORTÉS (CONT'D)

(pulls up a bench and sits  
right before Moctezuma)

You shall by no means be my  
prisoner, great Moctezuma, but an  
honored guest instead. Would a  
prisoner be allowed to administer  
his dominion in captivity? You  
shall maintain the continuity of  
your reign from the house of your  
dead father, receiving your nobles  
as ever before and leading your  
people in their continued  
prosperity.

MOCTEZUMA

Why not take instead my son and two  
daughters.

CORTÉS

You must come personally, there  
really is no other way.

MOCTEZUMA

Then I must speak with my nobles.

CORTÉS

You are their sovereign, whatever  
decisions you make they must abide  
by regardless. It is the same with  
my most excellent majesty, Carlos,  
beyond the great sea. If he issues  
his servant Cortés an order, does  
not Cortés obey his word?

De León grows impatient, pleads with Cortés...

DE LEÓN

What is the use of all these words?  
Either we take him or knife him.  
If we do not look after ourselves  
now we shall be dead men.

Moctezuma turns to Malinalli for a translation.

MOCTEZUMA

What did he say?

MALINALLI

My advice to you is to accompany  
Cortés and his captains to his  
quarters where you shall be treated  
with honor. Otherwise I am quite  
certain that they shall kill you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

Moctezuma knows from her tone that she is not exaggerating.

MOCTEZUMA

I can see wisdom in your request.

(standing up)

I shall join you in my father's house.

CORTÉS

Then so it shall be.

MOCTEZUMA

I shall only accompany you if it is given the appearance that I do so of my own free will.

CORTÉS

Of course.

Moctezuma gets up and his courtesans run over to him.

MOCTEZUMA

Bring me my litter at once.

The courtesans scramble off in different directions.

CORTÉS

Let us fellowship together in the House of Axayacatl.

INT. ROYAL COURT - CONTINUOUS

Cuitlahuac enters.

CUITLÁHUAC

What we feared would happen has happened.

TEOCTLAMACAZQUI

Where have they taken him then?

CUITLÁHUAC

They have all congregated inside the house of Axayacatl.

TEOCTLAMACAZQUI

Do the people know what has occurred?

CUITLÁHUAC

No.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TEOCTLAMACAZQUI

Then let us not allow them to know otherwise. When the time is at hand we shall use our numbers to overwhelm the fair-skinned ones.

INT. CORTES' QUARTERS - DAY

QUALPOPOCA, Mexica administrator and military officer, his two sons and fifteen other warriors are brought before Cortés by Moctezuma.

MOCTEZUMA

(in Nahuatl)

As I promised you, here is Qualpopoca as you requested.

Malinalli listens to Moctezuma and translates as usual...

MALINALLI

This is Qualpopoca.

MOCTEZUMA

I hand him over to you. Do with him as you please.

Cortés walks over to the Mexica warrior.

CORTÉS

(to Moctezuma)

Ask him what on this earth made him believe he could massacre my men.

The Spaniards come forward and seize Qualpopoca and his men, who offer no resistance.

CORTÉS (CONT'D)

I have some questions I would like to ask him.

INT. CHAMBER - LATER

Qualpopoca has ropes tied to his wrists and ankles as four Spaniards stretch his limbs as far as they can. He SHRIEKS in pain as the torture continues. Malinalli is there to translate for Cortés.

CORTÉS

Ask him who gave the order to kill Escalante and the others.

Malinalli asks Qualpopoca this word for word in Nahuatl.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

QUALPOPOCA

(in Nahuatl)

I acted of my own accord against  
the foreigners.

CORTÉS

Ask him again if he is certain of  
this.

MALINALLI

(in Nahuatl)

He wishes to know if you truly  
acted on your own. Tell him the  
truth, and you might yet live.

QUALPOPOCA

I make my own decisions. Attacked  
and killed them, and then we  
sacrificed them to our gods.

CORTÉS

(to Malinalli)

Well?

MALINALLI

He maintains that it was he who  
gave the order and him alone. They  
killed few, but sacrificed the  
rest.

Cortés waves his hand and the Spaniards pull on their ropes,  
dislocating Qualpopoca's arms. Alvarado comes over.

ALVARADO

What answer are you searching for,  
captain? The man has had enough,  
his arms have been pulled out of  
their sockets.

CORTÉS

I want to hear the truth, that  
Moctezuma himself gave the order.

ALVARADO

And what if this is not the truth?

CORTÉS

Then we shall make it so.  
(turning to a soldier)  
Go and fetch the irons.

INT. CHAMBER

Cortés himself takes the irons from a small fire and applies them to the torso of the battered Qualpopoca.

CORTÉS

Do not pretend to be so brave.  
Give in, and tell me the truth,  
then this shall all be finished!

ALVARADO

He has had enough, captain. He is  
in no condition to tell us  
anything.

CORTÉS

Unfortunately for him, I disagree  
with you.

He puts the irons on Qualpopoca's chest one last time.

CORTÉS (CONT'D)

Come here, Malinalli.

Malinalli does as she's told, scampering over to her master.

CORTÉS (CONT'D)

Ask him now, whether or not the  
order was given by Moctezuma.

Malinalli walks over to the half-dead chief and speaks softly to him, knowing the answer Cortés wants to hear...

MALINALLI

(in Nahuatl)

Think upon the question,  
Qualpopoca. Did Moctezuma, or did  
he not, give you the order to kill  
the Castilians?

Qualpopoca knows he's going to die anyway, so who knows if what he says is the truth.

QUALPOPOCA

(in Nahuatl)

Moctezuma... gave me the order.

CORTÉS

So?

MALINALLI

He says yes, Moctezuma commanded  
him to butcher your men.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CORTÉS

That wasn't so hard, now was it?  
 (motioning to Alvarado)  
 Muster your men in the courtyard at  
 once. And tell Sandoval to use the  
 spears and clubs from their armory  
 as fuel for the pyre, understood?

ALVARADO

Yes, Captain.

EXT. COURTYARD - TEMPLE OF HUITZILOPOCHTLI - LATER

Moctezuma is led into the courtyard in chains in full view of his subjects and nobles. Qualpopoca, his two sons and the 15 other warriors are bound to stakes in the center of the plaza. Alvarado and Sandoval walk over with torches in hand and light afire the bundles of confiscated wooden weapons gathered around the stakes.

Within seconds, human flesh is being scorched by the roaring flames. The SCREAMS of the victims absolutely horrifying and deafening. The nobles look on in disgust at their cowardly emperor as the Spaniards march him back into their quarters.

INT. MOCTEZUMA'S RECEPTION HALL - LATER

Moctezuma is having his daily meeting with the nobles. They all speak in Nahuatl:

ITZQUAUHTZIN

Great and wise emperor, we are confused by the events of recent days. The public execution carried out by the foreigners was truly grievous in their eyes.

CUITLÁHUAC

He speaks the truth, my lord. Your people are angry at the deaths of your subject Qualpopoca and his sons.

ITZQUAUHTZIN

Tell us that you are still our lord and emperor.

MOCTEZUMA

(proudly)  
 As surely as I sit here before you all, I tell you that I continue to rule my empire.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MOCTEZUMA (CONT'D)

That I am now residing in the house of my father is a sign of great respect and honor.

CACAMA

Is it true that you are here against your will?

MOCTEZUMA

I am not! I choose to be where I am. It is I who holds captive the strangers. The longer I am in their presence, the greater the knowledge and understanding I have of them and their odd ways.

CUITLÁHUAC

To what end, my lord?

MOCTEZUMA

Perhaps there is something we can learn from them, and their empire.

CUAUHTÉMOC

Then perhaps from us they might learn firstly how to bathe. They smell worse than wet dogs.

MOCTEZUMA

Our customs are not their customs, nephew.

CACAMA

Then I propose that you come forth and address your people, speak to them, great Moctezuma, for they are your children.

MOCTEZUMA

Yes, I know. But these things are beyond their understanding. When the time is right I shall stand before my people and set their troubled minds at ease.

ITZQUAUHTZIN

And what of the sacrifices, my lord?

MOCTEZUMA

You may continue with the sacrifices as always.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MOCTEZUMA (CONT'D)

I ask only that they be performed  
in the night, so as not to offend  
our honored guests.

ITZQUAUHTZIN

As you wish, my emperor.

MOCTEZUMA

Leave me now, I wish to commune  
with the gods.

They all exit the chamber.

INT. TEMPLE COURTYARD

The nobles are walking in the shade towards the central  
plaza. They all speak in Nahuatl:

CACAMA

The emperor has lost his way. See  
how the foreigners have completely  
cast a spell upon him.

ITZQUAUHTZIN

It would seem that our great lord  
is not himself any longer.

CACAMA

Perhaps we should then act of our  
own accords.

ITZQUAUHTZIN

Silence, Cacama, we must yet obey  
our lord and emperor! To speak as  
you do is blasphemous.

CACAMA

Then what shall we do?

ITZQUAUHTZIN

We must await answer from the gods.  
Meanwhile, This shall require  
double the sacrifices.

INT. HOUSE OF AXAYACATL - NIGHT

Alvarado and Olmedo discuss their recent fortune.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALVARADO

I still cannot believe that he convinced the ruler of all this, of more than one-hundred thousand warriors to agree to be his personal prisoner.

FRIAR OLMEDO

That is because you have so very little faith, Pedro. If you too placed your soul in the hands of our Blessed Lord as Cortés has done, you too might believe in his eternal wonders and blessings.

ALVARADO

Come now, brother, this is due more to guile and trickery than any spiritual interference. Our dear Cortés is displaying the full review of his greed and ambition. But again, it is not Moctezuma that worries me so, but his nobles and his brothers. They are not as easily fooled by our rascal charms, nor are they as childish as their emperor.

FRIAR OLMEDO

And here is where I just may have to agree with you, Alvarado. How long they shall remain pacified is uncertain.

ALVARADO

If I myself were in command I would have them all hanged atop their beloved temple, in full view of the barbaric populace. That would certainly put an end to any thoughts of rebellion.

FRIAR OLMEDO

Rebellion? Why we are not even occupying this wondrous city, much less possessing it.

ALVARADO

Soon enough, Olmedo. We are not here for the view.

EXT. HUNTING ISLET - DAY

Moctezuma reclines on the deck of one of the brigantines as he and Cortés sail peacefully on the lake next to Moctezuma's royal hunting ground. They pass the impressive *chinampas*, the large floating gardens where food is grown.

INT. ROYAL PALACE - NIGHT

Cortés meets with Moctezuma.

MOCTEZUMA

I wish to know the status of my nobles.

CORTÉS

They are all doing fine, as I promised you. No harm has befallen anyone.

MOCTEZUMA

Not as of yet.

CORTÉS

Nor shall anything happen under my watch.

MOCTEZUMA

And what is to be my fate?

CORTÉS

I think I shall take you back to Spain with me, as my honored guest, of course, and take you on a tour of our grand country.

MOCTEZUMA

By this you mean to parade me around as your captive.

CORTÉS

It would be healthy for you to see that there are other empires existing outside of your own, Great Ruler.

MOCTEZUMA

This is the only world I know.

CORTÉS

And this has been a serious misjudgment on your part.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CORTÉS (CONT'D)

If you only knew what great worlds  
lie just beyond your own, then it  
would be you visiting me in my  
palace.

MOCTEZUMA

Our two natures are every  
different. It is your nature to  
take without asking, it is my  
nature to give up without fighting.

CORTÉS

This part of you I have great  
difficulty understanding.

MOCTEZUMA

Time is not a straight line  
extending upward into the heavens,  
but instead it is a cycle,  
repeating itself over and over  
throughout the ages. All  
civilizations are doomed to repeat  
the same mistakes over and over as  
well.

CORTÉS

That much is undeniably true.

MOCTEZUMA

You and I both are locked together  
in our age, in the same cycle  
reliving a previous one. And even  
after we are both nothing but  
ashes, others will follow in our  
long forgotten paths.

CORTÉS

You make it sound so tragic, so  
harsh, when in reality this is the  
journey of life, the ones who take  
and the ones who will be taken.

MOCTEZUMA

The great feathered serpent still  
has not laid claim to his earthly  
throne.

CORTÉS

He shall not be returning to you  
and your people anytime soon.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CORTÉS (CONT'D)

All that you have been taught and believed about him has been a lie, a great falsehood perpetuated from time immemorial. There is but one God in the universe in which we both dwell, and he is the God that I serve.

MOCTEZUMA

Your god does not speak to me, I hear no voice from his mouth. I prefer to wait upon the will of Huitzilopochtli.

CORTÉS

In time you shall come around to see our side of things. And as I have always said, our Lord shall bless you and your people one-thousand fold.

MOCTEZUMA

I experience the blessings of my gods every day I draw breath. Their blessings give me wisdom, strength, and a supreme piece of mind. What does this god of yours give you?

CORTÉS

The promise of eternal life with him and his angelic host.

MOCTEZUMA

Why would a god so mighty desire his minions to dwell with him in his abode?

CORTÉS

Because he is a benevolent and merciful being.

MOCTEZUMA

And the god that you serve, Cortés, what does he think of your embassy here and the war you have waged with the tribes of this land?

CORTÉS

Inevitably I am forced into serving two masters.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

MOCTEZUMA

Then I do not envy you. What confusion you must have in your heart.

CORTÉS

My king also serves my Lord.

MOCTEZUMA

And this statue of a weak woman, I do not understand why you worship this goddess.

CORTÉS

She is the mother of my Lord.

MOCTEZUMA

Your god has a mother? Did he not create himself?

CORTÉS

In his earthly form, yes. He is a part of the holy trinity. Three gods in one.

MOCTEZUMA

This religion of yours is beyond confusing. To me it seems very childish.

CORTÉS

One must have the understanding of a child to enter the kingdom of Heaven.

MOCTEZUMA

Among us Mexica the first era of time was called four jaguar. In that age, giants walked the earth but did not till the soil or sow maize, instead only living by collecting wild fruits and roots. This imperfect era ended when a jaguar devoured the giants. The second era, four wind, was also flawed, and was destroyed by hurricanes that magically turned the existing men into monkeys, though they were humanlike, but not fully human creatures. The sign of this era was the mask of Quetzacoatl, lord of the winds.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

MOCTEZUMA (CONT'D)

The third era ended in a rain of fire, and its people either perished or were changed into birds. This happened on the day four rain. The fourth era was one of rains so abundant and frequent that the earth was deluged and people were changed into fish. The fifth and present era is prophesied to end in earthquakes. At the beginning of this final age came the sun, the moon and then humans.

CORTÉS

We Christians also believe in a great deluge that destroyed all mankind, save one man and his family.

MOCTEZUMA

Why this one man? Was he the son of a god?

CORTÉS

No, he was a mere mortal man, but he was favored by our Lord because of his unwavering faithfulness.

MOCTEZUMA

This constant compassion by your God I find unsettling. Has he no strength or rancor?

CORTÉS

He does, and when his divine anger is unleashed the heaven's tremble and the ground shakes and the oceans roar as his great wrath is unveiled. He makes your Tlaloc and Quetzacoatl hide for cover.

MOCTEZUMA

You do make me laugh like no other, Cortés. Your crudeness and frank nature is a welcome relief.

CORTÉS

This is because I am not one of your groveling nobles who gather at your feet like an oriental potentate.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

MOCTEZUMA

What does this word mean, oriental?

CORTÉS

It is nothing.

(gets up to leave)

I wish to retire now.

MOCTEZUMA

When you sleep with the Nahua woman, do you think of your Christian wife?

CORTÉS

This is blasphemy.

MOCTEZUMA

You tell me you are only allowed one wife in marriage yet you take her as your lover as I take many women. Why then do you refuse my daughters?

CORTÉS

You do not understand...

Moctezuma holds up his hand, silencing Cortés.

MOCTEZUMA

I understand perfectly.

CORTÉS

(angrily)

I bid you good night.

MOCTEZUMA

Throughout all time we have worshipped our own gods and thought that they were good. I do not doubt the goodness of the god whom you worship, but if he is good for Spain, our gods are equally good for Mexico... so do not trouble to speak to us any more about them at present.

Moctezuma smiles as Cortés leaves in a huff.

EXT. COAST - MORNING

PÁNFILO DE NARVÁEZ, a young duke and soldier in the Spanish Army, stands in a boat being rowed towards the shore.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

In the distance we see a fleet of ships anchored in the bay. He is here upon the orders of Governor Velázquez.

INT. HOUSE OF AXAYACATL - DAY

Moctezuma and Cortés are having their daily meeting. Moctezuma hands him a pictograph drawn by his spies.

MOCTEZUMA

I have something for you.

We see eighteen ships drawn in the Spanish style.

CORTÉS

What is this?

MOCTEZUMA

My spies observed these ships off the coast four days ago. They are friends of yours?

CORTÉS

Four days ago?

MOCTEZUMA

Yes.

CORTÉS

Why have you chosen to withhold this vital information from me?

MOCTEZUMA

I needed to ascertain the identity and intentions of these new visitors, in the same way I acted when you first arrived.

CORTÉS

These are very different circumstances, however.

MOCTEZUMA

How so? These men have ships that can provide you and your men with a way home, to your king, to your country.

CORTÉS

Who says I am in a hurry to leave this land? I am gravely disappointed with you, Moctezuma.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CORTÉS (CONT'D)

Is this the manner in which you choose to treat your honored guests, as you so often call us?

MOCTEZUMA

You misunderstand my motives in doing so. How could one in a foreign not be overjoyed to see one's countrymen, one's friends?

CORTÉS

This man and his Basque minions are not my friends, dear emperor. And they mean no one here anything but harm.

EXT. VERA CRUZ - MORNING

Three of Narvaez's men approach the town. They are the priest, FRIAR ANTONIO RUIZ DE GUEVARA, a notary, ALFONSO DE VERGARA, and ANTONIO DE AMAYA.

INT. CHAPEL

The three men kneel before the altar inside the open air hut that passes for a church, saying a prayer before carrying out their business. Guevara stands and blesses the other two.

EXT. SANDOVAL'S HUT

Guevara approaches Sandoval, who is reclining in a hammock.

FRIAR GUEVARA

Greetings, brother. I am Friar Antonio Ruiz de Guevara.

Sandoval seems entirely uninterested, though a little curious as to how other Spaniards are present.

SANDOVAL

I am Sandoval.

FRIAR GUEVARA

Ah, yes, they told me as much.

SANDOVAL

Why have you come here?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FRIAR GUEVARA

I have come here on the behalf of Captain-General Panfilo de Narvaez, who has arrived in the territory upon the orders of Governor Velazquez.

SANDOVAL

How exciting for you.

FRIAR GUEVARA

I recommend that you and your men give yourselves up to him, without incident. Don Cortés and his friends are traitors.

SANDOVAL

(stands up)

If you were not a priest, Guevara, I would have you beaten for using such language.

FRIAR GUEVARA

How dare you speak...

SANDOVAL

(interrupting)

You and your party should go immediately to the Mexica capital where you shall find Don Cortés, our Captain-General and justicia mayor of New Spain firmly in power. We are all better servants of His Majesty than either Velazquez or Narvaez.

Guevara turns to Vergara, motioning him forward.

FRIAR GUEVARA

Vergara, kindly read Sandoval the papers written by Governor Velazquez.

Before Vergara can obey, Sandoval cuts him off...

SANDOVAL

If you read those papers aloud, I shall have you given a hundred lashes.

Guevara is equally pissed off, but he doesn't know what to do next.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

SANDOVAL (CONT'D)

I have no knowledge as to whether this man Vergara is a royal notary or not, nor whether or not these papers of which you speak are copies or the originals.

(to Vergara)

If indeed you are not a notary you have no right to read out such a document, even it were genuine.

Guevara is incensed, gritting his teeth as he fumes at Vergara.

FRIAR GUEVARA

How is it that you are negotiating with these traitors? Bring out the decrees and read them aloud, now!

Sandoval acts quickly, waving his hand at his men now gathered outside the hut.

SANDOVAL

Arrest these men, and take them at once to Tenochtitlan.

The soldiers grab hold of Guevara and Vergara, Amaya is already bound.

SANDOVAL (CONT'D)

Let Cortés decide their fate.

INT. CORTES' QUARTERS - DAY

Cortés meets with Alvarado and Ordaz.

CORTÉS

I have decided to intercept Narváez and beat him at his own game. Sandoval has sent word that he has captured three of Narváez's emissaries.

ORDAZ

Do you think it very wise to do so without knowing the odds?

CORTÉS

I have always been a gambler, Ordaz, but I am not going without our allies.

(to Alvarado)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CORTÉS (CONT'D)

Pedro, I leave you in command of the men in my stead. I give you full authority to act as you see fit.

(to Ordaz)

And you shall be his second-in-command.

ALVARADO

Are you not fearful that the Mexica shall rise up against us in your absence?

CORTÉS

If such a thing happens, *Tonatiuh*, I trust you shall know how to best handle the situation.

ALVARADO

It is the men that concerns me the most. Already they fear a reprisal from Moctezuma's forces.

CORTÉS

If I do not stop Narváez now he shall advance towards the city and arouse the passions of the Mexica against us. I for one do not wish to meet my death at the end of a noose, which shall be all our fates if he defeats us.

ORDAZ

Then go with God, Cortés.

Cortés puts his hand on Ordaz's shoulder.

CORTÉS

Compadre, I know no other way. Death to him and anyone who argues about the matter, agreed?

Alvarado looks at the others, he knows he speaks for all the captains.

ALVARADO

Whatever you think.

CORTÉS

Let the ass die or whoever spurs him... it is the same thing.

INT. HOUSE OF AXAYACATL

Cortés visits with Moctezuma.

CORTÉS

Moctezuma, I shall be leaving for the coast presently. Alvarado and the others shall command in my stead.

MOCTEZUMA

And why are you leaving?

CORTÉS

I must welcome some of my fellow countrymen to your great empire.

MOCTEZUMA

More of your own people have come?

CORTÉS

They were uninvited, however.

MOCTEZUMA

This is a good thing. You and your men can sail home with them to be with your families.

CORTÉS

It is not as simple as that, emperor. They mean me and my men harm, and towards you and your people as well. This is why I must prevent them from ever reaching your fair and wondrous city.

MOCTEZUMA

So be it.

CORTÉS

I shall return in a few days time.

EXT. TENOCHTITLAN - EVENING

Cortés and hundred of his men ride across the causeway towards the Mexican coast and an uncertain meeting.

INT. HOUSE OF AXAYACATL - DAY

Moctezuma conducts his usual business while seated on his throne. His nobles are gathered around him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Alvarado watches uneasily from the shadows, his paranoia growing by the minute. Pedro De Ircio enters and gets Alvarado's attention.

PEDRO DE IRCIO  
A word, Alvarado.

They move over to an alcove for privacy.

ALVARADO  
What is the matter?

PEDRO DE IRCIO  
I have been hearing disturbing rumors that Moctezuma is in contact with Narváez, even exchanging gifts with him for his allegiance.

ALVARADO  
We are in a most difficult position. I do not even know if Cortés is still alive, much less intercepted Narváez.

PEDRO DE IRCIO  
The men are frightened, Alvarado. They have installed stakes in the ground of the temple plaza. The Tlascalans tell us these are to be used for impaling us before we are sacrificed and eaten at their festival!

ALVARADO  
I too have seen strange sights these last few days. The temple buildings have been draped in cloth canopies like the ones we saw before covering their foul sacrificial ceremonies.

PEDRO DE IRCIO  
Is this not all the proof that you need? We must act before we are set upon and overwhelmed.

ALVARADO  
We don't stand a chance.

PEDRO DE IRCIO  
Then we have nothing to lose by striking the first blow.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

He leaves as Alvarado approaches Moctezuma, who is finishing his discussion with one of his nobles.

ALVARADO  
Good day to you, emperor.

MOCTEZUMA  
(nodding respectfully)  
*Tonatiuh.*

ALVARADO  
Would you care for a game of totoloqui?

MOCTEZUMA  
Not just now.

A servant girl brings Moctezuma a goblet full of heated chocolate to drink. She offers none to Alvarado.

MOCTEZUMA (CONT'D)  
I feel tired.

ALVARADO  
As you wish.

Moctezuma gets up to leave.

MOCTEZUMA  
I shall retire for the day.

He heads off toward his chamber, leaving Alvarado as suspicious as ever. The boy Orteguilla throws a rubber ball like the one used in the ball court against the wall as he tries to use his hips and emulate the Mexica. Alvarado takes the ball in one hand, resting the other on Orteguilla's shoulder.

ALVARADO  
Tell me, Orteguilla... what is going on inside the head of the emperor?

INT. HOUSE OF AXAYACATL - DAY

Moctezuma approaches Alvarado, who is playing cards with some of the Castilians.

MOCTEZUMA  
A moment of your time, Tonatiuh.

ALVARADO  
I am busy.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MOCTEZUMA

It is of great importance.

ALVARADO

(looking up)

What is it?

MOCTEZUMA

In private, if you please.

Alvarado lays his cards down.

ALVARADO

Come with me, Orteguilla.

He gets up and walks with Moctezuma off to an alcove. Orteguilla has learned Nahuatl from spending so much time with the emperor. Moctezuma speaks in Nahuatl with Orteguilla:

ORTEGUILLA

Moctezuma asks that you forgive him for his uncourteous behavior the other day. He was not feeling himself.

ALVARADO

Apology accepted, emperor.

Orteguilla translates this for Moctezuma:

ORTEGUILLA

He therefore comes to you in need of a great favor. He wishes to ask for permission to hold the festival of Toxcatl. It is one of the most sacred festivals of the year to the Mexica.

ALVARADO

What sort of festival is this, Toxcatl?

Orteguilla translates, Moctezuma answers:

ORTEGUILLA

Of course there is much dancing and drumming in celebration of Huitzilopochtli.

ALVARADO

This is their war-god, is it not?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

ORTEGUILLA

Yes.

ALVARADO

Honoring ole witchy-lobos, eh?

Moctezuma mutters something to Orteguilla:

ORTEGUILLA

Moctezuma asks this with your kind and humble permission, *Tonatiuh*.

ORTEGUILLA (CONT'D)

The nobles think it fortuitous that we must ask you in place of our dear Cortés.

ALVARADO

How do you mean?

ORTEGUILLA

He says they believe that you are perhaps more in tune with our people's sensibilities. And that you, above Cortés, have this deeper understanding of our ways and life.

ALVARADO

Very well, Orteguilla. Tell him that he may stage his festival. Under our supervision, of course.

(beat)

But no human sacrifices... under any circumstances.

Orteguilla looks at Moctezuma, simply winking his eye. Moctezuma gives him a handsign meaning yes.

ORTEGUILLA

The emperor agrees.

ALVARADO

I shall return to my game now.

Moctezuma wins a major victory with the help of the innocent Orteguilla.

EXT. TEMPLE COURTYARD - DAY

Hundreds of Mexica laborers construct woodworkings and stages for the festival. Several Spaniards observe them from the top of a nearby building.

## EXT. PATIO OF DANCES - NIGHT

The festival of Toxcatl is underway. Thousands of warriors are gathered nearby and all of the Mexica nobility are gathered in the confines of the courtyard. ROWS OF DRUMMERS are situated atop the wooden stages and they BEAT the large drums with pounding, monotonous rhythms of great passion.

## EXT. SPANISH CAMP - NIGHT

Cortés and Malinalli sit beside one another by a burning fire.

MALINALLI

You are troubled this night.

CORTÉS

A great burden is upon me. There are many roads I might take from here.

MALINALLI

It seems that all important men must make decisions that effect the lives of others.

CORTÉS

They have placed their trust in me, as has the Crown of my country.

MALINALLI

Do you wish me to leave you alone?

CORTÉS

No...

(touches her arms  
tenderly)

I wish you to stay here beside me.

Malinalli nods her head and moves in close to her lover.

## EXT. BALCONY - HOUSE OF AXAYACATL

The Spaniards observe the celebrating Aztec warriors as they participate in the festival of Toxcatl honoring the fearsome war god Huitzilopochtli.

FIRST SOLDIER

Something isn't right about all this. They are amassed in great numbers out there.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALVARADO

They are harmless. Besides, it is best to let them celebrate their festival. Otherwise, they might rise up against us even so.

FIRST SOLDIER

That is what I mean, sir. Perhaps they are merely letting their guard down to make us do the same. We would never leave here alive if they attacked us.

SECOND SOLDIER

He is right. Cortés has put us in a position of weakness here, ordering us not to show aggression against them, when it is they who aggress towards us.

ALVARADO

And what would you all have me do... disobey direct orders?

FIRST SOLDIER

If it means saving our lives, then yes. To hell with orders!

SECOND SOLDIER

Waiting too long, sir, might eliminate our chances of maintaining the advantage. We do have our weapons at hand.

Alvarado gazes upon the warriors dancing their ceremonial steps.

EXT. PATIO OF DANCES

The noise is deafening from the massive celebration, and such a large gathering of Mexica causes paranoia amongst the Spaniards. Dancers in exotic feathered costumes dance wildly to the pounding drums. Eagle and Jaguar warriors perform dances with their weaponry in hand. Then it happens... the gruesome sacrifices begin. Numerous victims have their hearts ripped out in honor of Huitzipochotli.

EXT. BALCONY

Alvarado and the others are still contemplating a preemptive strike against their hosts.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FIRST SOLDIER

What say you, sir?

ALVARADO

I say that caution shall keep us  
safe from harm.

The Second Soldier steps forward, standing in Alvarado's  
face.

SECOND SOLDIER

Then I say you are a fool!

ALVARADO

Hold your tongue, soldier, lest I  
order it removed from your rotting  
mouth.

The other soldiers restrain their comrade, knowing full well  
Alvarado will make good on his threat.

SECOND SOLDIER

These are our lives you are  
trifling with! They have already  
begun their sacrifices!

ALVARADO

Pull yourselves together! I shall  
not endanger any of our lives!

He takes one last look at the mayhem down below. A Priest  
holds up a freshly-cut heart from the chest of his victim and  
holds it aloft before their war god's effigy.

EXT. SPANISH CAMP - MORNING

A SPANISH SOLDIER rousts Cortés from his sleep with urgent  
news.

SPANISH SOLDIER

Pardon me, sir, but our scouts have  
come across Narváez's men.

EXT. NARVÁEZ'S CAMP - VERACRUZ - LATER

Narváez meets with Cortés about his apparent insubordination.

NARVÁEZ

Hernán Cortés, we meet at last. I  
am Pánfilo de Narváez.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CORTÉS

I am pleased to make your acquaintance.

NARVÁEZ

I trust you understand fully why I have been sent here?

CORTÉS

The thought had occurred to me along the way.

NARVÁEZ

Then I shall detail the reason for you. Against the wishes of Spain and his royal majesty Charles V, you have blatantly superseded your authority in attacking the Aztec capitol.

CORTÉS

Begging your pardon, we have attacked in no such way. We entered their territory peacefully, seeking only to make contact with their ruling class for purposes of trade and assistance.

NARVÁEZ

Is that so? Then where may I ask, are the rest of your men, presently?

CORTÉS

Naturally I left a contingent in the city for safety purposes and the maintaining of good relations with the natives.

NARVÁEZ

Perhaps a garrison might better describe your contingent.

CORTÉS

And what does mighty Spain ask of me?

NARVÁEZ

Nothing more at all, Cortés. I am to take you back to Cuba with me at once. Your expedition here is now over.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CORTÉS

What is to become of the rest of my men at Tenochtitlan?

NARVÁEZ

You will provide us a map of the area and we shall send a party to retrieve them.

CORTÉS

And if the natives resist? What will your men do then? They outnumber you ten to one.

NARVÁEZ

None of this is of any further concern to you.

CORTÉS

Then it is settled?

NARVÁEZ

That it is.

CORTÉS

Very well. Please allow me to make camp with my men until tomorrow. I will then place myself in your custody.

NARVÁEZ

Agreed.

CORTÉS

I bid you good night.

NARVÁEZ

Good night.

He bows and allows Cortés to leave his company and his immediate sight.

RANGEL

What are we to do, sir?

CORTÉS

Resist them, naturally.

RANGEL

They number nine hundred with eighty horses and twelve pieces of artillery.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

CORTÉS

Three to one odds shall serve us better than them. His men have no personal desire to oppose us apart from mere orders.

VELÁZQUEZ DE LEÓN

Then we'll attack them at night.

CORTÉS

We shall take Narváez as quickly as possible then the others shall surrender.

VELÁZQUEZ DE LEÓN

You seem mighty sure of that.

CORTÉS

Do as I say if you wish to stay alive.

VELÁZQUEZ DE LEÓN

Very well, Cortés. I hope you keep your word since I've thrown in my lot with you against my own family.

CORTÉS

You are responsible for your own decisions, as am I.

EXT. NARVÁEZ'S CAMP - VERACRUZ - NIGHT

Narváez's men busy themselves fortifying their position in the town. They pitch their tents and set up their cannons.

INT. NARVÁEZ'S HUT

Two of Narváez's captains JUAN BONO DE QUEJO and GERÓNIMO MARTÍNEZ DE SALVATIERRA drink wine and play cards. Narváez rests on a bed with the local CEMPOALLAN CHIEFTAIN seated nearby.

SALVATIERRA

One of the scouts claims he spotted Cortés army camped only three miles from here.

CORTÉS

I do not believe it. He would never march in this weather.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BONO DE QUEJO

Still, it might be true all the same.

NARVÁEZ

It is nothing to worry about.

CEMPOALLAN CHIEF

This man I know, and I fear. He will attack when you least expect it.

Salvatierra and De Quejo laugh at the suggestion, downing more wine.

SALVATIERRA

(to Narváez)

Do you truly take Cortesillo to be so brave that, with the three cats which he commands, he will come and attack us just because this fat chief says so?

BONO DE QUEJO

(laughing)

Haha, three cats.

NARVÁEZ

Finish your game, Salvatierra, and go easy on the wine.

SALVATIERRA

(holding up his cup)

Aye, Captain.

EXT. NARVÁEZ'S HUT - LATER

The rain is coming down hard now. Even though Narváez doubts Cortés will act, he nevertheless takes several precautions. He observes the town's impressive pyramid. He summons Andres De Duero.

NARVÁEZ

Andrés, move my quarters to the top of the pyramid.

ANDRÉS DE DUERO

Do you believe he means to strike so soon?

NARVÁEZ

Better safe than sorry, I suppose.  
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NARVÁEZ (CONT'D)  
 (suddenly recalls that  
 Duero knows Cortés)  
 How well do you know him?

ANDRÉS DE DUERO  
 As well as most. We both arrived  
 in Hispaniola at the same time.

NARVÁEZ  
 I too remember him from when he  
 first arrived. He was always a  
 brash and ambitious sort, wasn't  
 he?

ANDRÉS DE DUERO  
 Nothing wrong with that. After  
 all, isn't that the reason we are  
 all here in this new world?

NARVÁEZ  
 Law and order must still be  
 maintained, despite the savage  
 conditions we find ourselves  
 exposed to in this wretched land.

ANDRÉS DE DUERO  
 More of the old world in the new  
 one, no?

NARVÁEZ  
 Why change a system that works so  
 well?

ANDRÉS DE DUERO  
 Isn't that what the Moors said  
 about us Castilians before the  
 reconquest?

NARVÁEZ  
 (puzzled)  
 That is a rather odd example,  
 Andrés.

ANDRÉS DE DUERO  
 Not really. Ultimately we are  
 repeating the same cycle as that of  
 the Moorish conquest within our own  
 country.

NARVÁEZ  
 Surely you jest?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

ANDRÉS DE DUERO

In time, these naturals shall even produce their own *El Cid* to combat our unwanted incursions.

NARVÁEZ

Whose side are you on, Andrés?

ANDRÉS DE DUERO

My own, Captain... my own.

EXT. PATIO OF DANCES - NIGHT

The Mexica begin their festival with LOUD DRUMMING and CHANTING. FLUTE PLAYERS play along to the drumming. Hundreds of Nobles are present as well as thousands of dancers and revelers.

INT. HOUSE OF AXAYACATL - NIGHT

Alvarado and his men put on their armor and gather their weapons.

EXT. JUNGLE - NIGHT

Cortés gathers his captains together in preparation for their ambush.

CORTÉS

Let us make this as short and sweet as possible. They shall never expect us to strike in this weather, and Narváez is most certainly expecting us to attack at dawn.

(turns to his cousin,  
DIEGO PIZARRO)

Diego, take your men around and attack their flanks and seize their artillery.

(and now to Sandoval)

Hit them hard and fast, Sandoval, give them no time to react. I give you charge to seize Narváez, and kill him if he resists you.

(his orders for Ordaz)

Capture Salvatierra and hold him at bay. He is their most valuable asset.

(to Velázquez de León)

Despite what your loyalties may truly be, I need you to capture your own kinsman, Diego.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VELÁZQUEZ DE LEÓN

It is not a problem for me, I assure you. I am not very fond of him.

CORTÉS

Good.

(to everyone)

It is better to die for a good cause than live in dishonor. So our lives and honor are in the hands of God now.

EXT. TEMPLE PRECINCT - NIGHT

As the dancing and music reach a frenzied fevered pitch, Alvarado and his men enter the courtyard. No one gives an order, but a Spaniard sneaks up on a Drummer and severs his hands with a sword blow. In the noise of the celebration, no one hears the SCREAMS of the other Drummers as they are taken out one by one.

As the SOUND of the DRUMMING ceases, the Spaniards enter battle mode, killing every Mexica they see. Heads are lopped off, arms are severed, and guts are sliced open letting their entrails pour out onto the stone floor of the courtyard. Soon enough the flower of the Mexica nobility lay brutally butchered in their own pools of blood.

EXT. NARVÁEZ'S CAMP - NIGHT

Under heavy rain, Diego Pizarro advances with his men towards the lightly defended camp. They kill the few sentries opposing them then take control of their enemies's artillery.

INT. NARVÁEZ'S HUT

Salvatierra is stirred by the noise outside. He grabs his sword and runs out to the temple platform. We see below him a battle taking place between his men and those of Cortés. He runs back inside and awakens Narváez...

SALVATIERRA

We're under attack!

Narváez gets up, grabbing his scabbard...

NARVÁEZ

Damn you, Cortés!

## EXT. NARVÁEZ'S CAMP - NIGHT

The battle rages despite the heavy downpour, Cortés's men getting the better of Narváez's disoriented forces. Ordaz arrives and takes control of the situation.

Cortés plays a peripheral role -- his men waiting in the wings until truly needed. Ávila's men chop their way towards the pyramid where Narváez's men are making their final stand.

## ON ORDAZ

running up the steep pyramid steps. He spots his mark, and rapidly disarms Salvatierra, forcing him to the ground with his sword at his throat.

## ATOP THE PYRAMID

## ON NARVÁEZ

defending himself with his two-handed broadsword known as a montante. He's pushed back towards his hut by a younger man. It is one of Sandoval's fearless pikemen, PEDRO GUTIÉRREZ DE VALDELOMAR, charges him and wields his pike with great agility, striking a vicious blow that cuts Narváez's eye out.

## NARVÁEZ

Holy Mary, protect me, for they  
have killed me and destroyed my  
eye!

He falls to the ground with Valdelomar standing over him, the edge of his pike aimed at Narváez's chest.

## NARVÁEZ (CONT'D)

Stop, my eye! My eye!

## ÁVILA

Go to the devil, traitor! Worry  
for your cursed soul over your eye.

Blood gushes out of the wound, Narváez holding his hand over the gory eye socket.

## NARVÁEZ

I need my surgeon!

Cortés and Sandoval arrive on the scene to find their foe writhing in agony on the muddy ground.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SANDOVAL

(smiling)

Better that we fetch you a priest,  
you treacherous dog.

CORTÉS

You have received better than your  
deserts.

NARVÁEZ

In your power I am, for the love of  
God, do not let these gentlemen  
kill me.

CORTÉS

(to Sandoval))

Look after the prisoner.

(to Ávila)

Go and find his surgeon.

EXT. TEMPLE PRECINCT - NIGHT

The Spaniards sack the nearby temples, setting them afire after taking anything of value. JUAN ÁLVAREZ, a soldier in charge of procuring food, runs into the courtyard as the WAILING for the dead is heard in the background. He finds Alvarado SHOUTING orders to his men...

ALVARADO

Everyone withdraw at once, back to  
our quarters!

ÁLVAREZ

What has happened, sir? The  
streets are filled with Indians  
armed to the teeth.

ALVARADO

What has happened, Álvarez, is that  
he who begins the battle, wins. We  
have killed two or three thousands  
Mexica this night.

ÁLVAREZ

What about our food?

ALVARADO

The devil take the food, for we  
have taken action. As the Indians  
did not take the first step, we  
have done so ourselves!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

A group of Mexica spectators enter the courtyard slinging stones and darts at the Spaniards, pushing them back towards the tiny streets beside the temple. Alvarado is struck in the head by a stone. Álvarez drags him to safety.

INT. HOUSE OF AXAYACATL - CONTINUOUS

The wounded Spaniards set about fortifying the temple as their quarters are surrounded by the angry mob. Inside, all the remaining nobles lie dead on the floor. Alvarado heads straight for the frightened Moctezuma.

ALVARADO

(angrily)

See what your people have done to me!

MOCTEZUMA

If you had not begun it, Alvarado, my men would not have done this.

(beat)

You have now ruined yourselves, and me also.

Alvarado is furious as he enters, his face covered in blood from his wound. He takes out his knife and presses it against Moctezuma's chest.

ALVARADO

(calmly)

Order your men to call off the battle.

Moctezuma sees the mad dog inside Alvarado's eyes, and knows he will gladly kill him...

MOCTEZUMA

I shall try.

Itzquauhtzin intervenes on his emperor's behalf...

ITZQUAUHTZIN

Let me speak to our people.

EXT. TEMPLE ROOFTOP

The SHOUTING and CHANTING is intense as Itzquauhtzin tries to calm his countrymen...

ITZQUAUHTZIN

O Mexica, hear me. We are not the equal of the Castilians. Let battle be abandoned.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ITZQUAUHTZIN (CONT'D)

Let the arrow and shield be  
stilled. Unhappy are the poor old  
men and women, the common folk,  
those not yet of understanding, who  
toddle, who crawl, who lie in  
cradles, those yet untrained! For  
this reason your ruler says 'may  
battle cease', for they have placed  
irons on his feet.

The mob's fury dies down and slowly they retreat from the  
temple precinct.

INT. HOUSE OF AXAYACATL

The Spaniards' wounds are tended by their servants. Alvarado  
rests against the wall, the LAMENTING and WAILING continuing  
on in all parts of the city.

EXT. NARVÁEZ'S CAMP

Cortés's men round up the prisoners, only a few of Narváez's  
men have been killed.

EXT. NARVÁEZ'S HUT - CONTINUOUS

Cortés visits Narváez, who is bound in chains.

CORTÉS

How is your wound?

NARVÁEZ

I have lost an eye. How do you  
think it is?

CORTÉS

You shall survive this.

NARVÁEZ

Well, Captain Cortés, you must  
consider it a great thing to have  
beaten me and made me your  
prisoner.

CORTÉS

My victory was thanks to our  
merciful Lord and the brave men  
whom I have fighting for me.  
(hands him over a small  
flask of water)  
As for you, your capture is one of  
the least things which I have done  
here in New Spain.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NARVÁEZ

(grinning)

Still, you are as lucky in your undertakings as Octavius in his conquests as Caesar, and in overcoming difficulties as Hannibal.

CORTÉS

*Viva el rey, Spiritu Santo.*

He is interrupted by a man from Santander named BOTELLO PUERTO DE PLATA, a so-called soothsayer and magician, who stands before him in a trance, his eyes making no contact with Cortés.

BOTELLO

Señor, do not delay here long, because you should know that Pedro de Alvarado, your captain, whom you left in the city of Tenochtitlan, is in great danger, since the Mexica have made war against him and have killed a man, and are trying to climb into our quarters by ladders. So that it would be good if you went back quickly.

CORTÉS

How do you know this, Botello?

BOTELLO

A demon told me, in one of my visions.

CORTÉS

You are a mad man, you know that?

BOTELLO

Nevertheless...

Cortés looks down at a much relieved Narváez.

CORTÉS

It is most definitely your lucky day.

EXT. VALLEY OF MEXICO - MORNING

Cortés's returning army, now including those of Narváez's men, slowly approach Lake Texcoco. Shining Tenochtitlan is visible in the distance.

## EXT. DIRT ROAD

As the army marches on, a dust cloud surrounding them, we see a Mexican hanging from a tree. The corpse is blackened, rotted and putrid. Below the tree, directly under the dead man, is a large pile of bread being eaten by dozens of wild turkeys.

## EXT. CAUSEWAY - DAY

As the army crosses the bridge, the horse of PEDRO DE SOLÍS breaks its hoof in between two planks. Botello takes notice, exchanging glances with Cortés.

BOTELLO  
(to Sandoval)  
This does not bode well.

SANDOVAL  
Save your sorcery for someone of  
little faith.

Diego de Ordaz rides alongside Cortés...

ORDAZ  
It is far too quiet for my liking,  
captain.

CORTÉS  
I was just thinking the same  
thought. I fully expected their  
largest army blocking our path into  
the city. Instead, we are greeted  
with an uncomfortable silence.

The vanguard of the haggard and dust-covered caravan of Castilians and Indians enters Tenochtitlan.

## EXT. TEMPLE COURTYARD

Cortés and his captains arrive first. All around him the dead are being dragged away from the square by their loved ones. The stones are stained red. A priest comes forward CHANTING unintelligibly. He grabs at the reins of Cortés's horse.

CORTÉS  
(shoving the priest away)  
Marina, what is he blabbering  
about?

Malinalli comes forward and speaks with the priest in Nahuatl.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MALINALLI

He says there was a great slaughter here. All the nobles are dead.

CORTÉS

What slaughter? Ask him what happened to my men?

Malinalli translates for the priest. The priest answers back...

MALINALLI

He says the your men attacked the nobles during the festival of Toxcatl...

CORTÉS

But why? I gave express permission for the festival to take place.

MALINALLI

He says that Alvarado also gave them permission, but that the Castilians came with their metal weapons and killed everyone in sight.

CORTÉS

*Hijo de gran puta!*

INT. HOUSE OF AXAYACATL - NIGHT

Cortés enters, heading straight for Alvarado.

CORTÉS

(angrily)

Alvarado!

(pushes him backwards, up against the stone wall)

What in the name of hell have you done?

ALVARADO

You do not understand, you were not present.

CORTÉS

Make me understand, Pedrito! Make me understand why you slaughtered nearly all of the Mexica nobility!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALVARADO

The portrait of the Virgin Mary and the cross you placed inside the temple infuriated them. They could not remove them because of the nails we used.

CORTÉS

I do not find this a sufficient enough reason for them to initiate an attack.

ALVARADO

It was the festival. The dancing, the chanting, the drums, the noise! They were planning on killing us at the height of their celebration.

CORTÉS

But they told me that they asked your permission to hold their feasts and dances!

ALVARADO

Had you been here you would have seen clearly their intentions. They meant to butcher us, rip out our hearts, and wear our skins as cloaks.

CORTÉS

Damn you to hell. Your foolishness has placed us in a most precarious situation, Alvarado. I trusted you to command as I command. I trusted you to use wisdom, not violence in my stead. And this is how you repay me?

ALVARADO

My decision was poor, a madness overtook me. I wished to God that Moctezuma escaped and he never has to listen to this story.

CORTÉS

Where is he now?

ALVARADO

In the courtyard, awaiting an audience with you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Cortés is truly furious, at both Alvarado and Moctezuma. Two Mexica servants approach him. They speak first with Malinalli.

CORTÉS  
What do they want?

MALINALLI  
Moctezuma wishes to speak with you.

CORTÉS  
They can all go to hell and burn  
for eternity?

Cortés moves towards the servants, anger burning in his eyes as he reprimands them...

CORTÉS (CONT'D)  
Visit him? Why the dog doesn't  
even keep the market open, send us  
food to eat!

Diego de Ordaz moves to calm his leader down, grabbing his arm.

ORDAZ  
It is not his fault, and had he not  
ascended the wall and calmed his  
people, we would most certainly  
have perished by now.

Cortés shoves him aside forcefully, only enraged by his captain's defense of the emperor.

CORTÉS  
(angrily)  
Why should I be civil to a dog who  
was holding secret negotiations  
with Narváez, and now, as you can  
see, does not give us any food?

The two servants back away in the face of Cortés's rage against everything and everyone.

CORTÉS (CONT'D)  
(pointing at Moctezuma)  
Take him away now! Get him out of  
my sight?

Ordaz and Lugo take Moctezuma by the arms and drag him away, his heavy leg chains JANGLING on the stone floor. Cortés turns his attention to Alvarado once again...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

CORTÉS (CONT'D)

And as for you, Sandoval shall now  
be my second-in-command.

ALVARADO

As you like.

INT. MOCTEZUMA'S CHAMBER - LATER

Malinalli stands before the dejected emperor.

MALINALLI

Cortés asks that you open the  
market so his may acquire  
provisions.

MOCTEZUMA

What more does Malinche ask of me?  
I no longer have the power to do  
this.

MALINALLI

You are still the emperor of the  
Mexico, therefore conduct yourself  
as such.

MOCTEZUMA

I do not believe anyone shall  
listen to me now. I have forsaken  
my people by allowing myself this  
great indignity for the gain of  
your lord and master.

MALINALLI

He has been good to me. Your  
people bought and sold me as a  
slave.

MOCTEZUMA

These are the ways of both of our  
peoples.

MALINALLI

I am changed. I have a place,  
status among the Christians.

MOCTEZUMA

They shall never let you be their  
equal, child.

MALINALLI

Would the Tlascalans, the Otomi, or  
the Mexico?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She turns to leave...

MOCTEZUMA

There is one lord remaining who still carries influence.

MALINALLI

Who is he?

MOCTEZUMA

My brother, Cuitláhuac, he can be of assistance to you in my stead.

MALINALLI

I hope so for your sake.

INT. TEMPLE - NIGHT

Cuitláhuac meets in secret with the few remaining nobles.

CUITLÁHUAC

The Teules released me believing that I would reopen the market for them, but I refuse to serve these ungrateful, impudent men who smell of dogs. We are now all that is left of our people's nobility, and we shall endure to the end when we see the hearts of the fair-skinned ones ripped from their chests.

FIRST MEXICA NOBLE

Tell us what to do, and we shall obey.

CUITLÁHUAC

Moctezuma has fallen under the spell of these... Christians, and he no longer has the capability to lead our people. Therefore, I shall rule in the place of my poor, defeated brother.

FIRST MEXICA NOBLE

We too are all in agreement that you should be our rightful *tlatoani*.

SECOND MEXICA NOBLE

We annul the rule of your brother. You are now the emperor of the Mexica, Cuitláhuac.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CUITLÁHUAC

Gather the warriors. We have a  
battle to fight.

INT. HOUSE OF AXAYACATL - MORNING

The brilliant sun rises over the glistening Texcoco Lake.

Cortés peers out his window, awaiting the arrival of his  
courier, ANTÓN DEL RÍO.

EXT. HOUSE OF AXAYACATL

We see a ragged figure below. It's Del Río, struggling to  
make it up the steps to the Spanish quarters.

INT. HOUSE OF AXAYACATL

Del Río stumbles into the room, bloodied and beaten, barely  
alive. Cortés and his captains rush to his aid.

CORTÉS

What has happened?

DEL RÍO

All the bridges have been raised, I  
never exited the city.

ALVARADO

*Dios mio.*

DEL RÍO

The warriors have gathered in all  
quarters, preparing for battle.  
There were so many, tens of  
thousands.

Cortés exchanges looks of fear with Alvarado and Sandoval.  
They all know what they have to do.

ALVARADO

Let us hope your Blessed Virgin is  
as merciful as you say.

EXT. TENOCHTITLAN - DAY

Throngs of Mexica warriors run through the streets  
barricading passageways with planks and rocks. Others lift  
the last of the bridges and hundreds of warriors man the main  
causeway to the land, blocking off the only escape route.

EXT. LAKE TEXCOCO

Hundreds of Mexica arrive in canoes from the surrounding cities to assist in the fight.

EXT. HOUSE OF AXAYACATL - LATER

The Spaniards arm themselves. They don their armor and load their weapons as a SHRILLING WARCRY RESOUNDS throughout the capital. We see the first wave of warriors advance towards the compound, stomping and CHANTING as they near the temple. Cortés leads Ordaz and his men with their firearms to the side of the temple's steps.

CORTÉS

Take the harquebusers and utilize them as best you can. That should hold them back for awhile.

ORDAZ

And if they do not?

CORTÉS

Call on brave Santiago to aid you, and I shall soon join the fray.

Ordaz heads off with his riflemen. The battle for Tenochtitlan begins...

INT. HOUSE OF AXAYACATL

Cortés pulls aside Sandoval...

CORTÉS

Gather as much of the gold as you can, we must provide his majesty with the royal fifth.

SANDOVAL

As for us, your faithful captains?

CORTÉS

As much as each man can carry. We'll be fortunate to leave this place with our lives, much less our reward.

(turns to Alvarado who  
waits in the wings)

Arm your men and prepare to lead our departure.

ALVARADO

It is done. And you?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CORTÉS

Someone has to lead the Tlascalans.  
I fear they shall abandon us in the  
thick of the fight.

ALVARADO

*Santiago y cierre España!*

CORTÉS

*Santiago y cierre España.*

EXT. PLAZA

Diego de Ordaz and his men are almost completely surrounded by a crazed horde of Mexica as they fight for their very lives. The sheer numbers of the enemy make it impossible to gain any ground. Many of the Spaniards are killed as the onslaught intensifies -- Ordaz himself is struck by two arrows and receives a vicious blow from an obsidian club.

ORDAZ

Fall back! Make your way back to  
the temple!

It's a struggle to retreat as the overwhelming force of the Mexica follow after the Spaniards. As Ordaz is about to be overtaken, Cortés appears at the head of the Tlascalans to relieve him and his men.

Cortés's reinforcements manage to even the odds if but for a brief moment. They butcher hundreds more of the Mexica, yet the CHANTING and SHOUTING intensifies. Lugo bravely leads the Castilian faction of this force.

CORTÉS

(to Lugo)

I don't know how much longer we can  
hold them. We need Alvarado, right  
now!

LUGO

I shall send for him!

CORTÉS

Make haste, Lugo, or we shall not  
see the dawn!

Lugo departs to fetch Alvarado. Cortés fights three warriors who are anxious to claim his scalp. He kills two of them by the sword, but the third one smashes his left hand with a blow from his war club. Cortés is rescued by Lugo's men who surround him and spirit him back to the temple's safety.

INT. HOUSE OF AXAYACATL - CONTINUOUS

A medic attends to Cortés' hand as he brought into the compound.

CORTÉS

My hand is useless now.

De Tapia inspects the damage done to his leader.

DE TAPIA

We must repel them now before they breach the walls.

CORTÉS

Send your men to the rooftop, have them fire the cannons, the harquebuses, the falconets, crossbows, the whole lot!

De Tapia leaves to execute his orders. Now Sandoval appears.

SANDOVAL

The royal fifth is packed and ready, as you ordered.

CORTÉS

Good, let us prepare to evacuate the temple.

SANDOVAL

Cortés, you are in no condition to travel like this. Besides, the temple is entirely surrounded.

CORTÉS

How did I let this happen? Caesar would have never left himself so exposed.

SANDOVAL

Caesar is not here with us, sir. Who knows what decision he would have made in the same position.

CORTÉS

Right you are, Sandoval. We shall have to withstand them for the time being.

EXT. TEMPLE ROOFTOP

The Spaniards FIRE their cannons into the crowd of Mexica, the crossbowmen hit their targets with deadly accuracy, and the harquebusers SHOOT faster than they have ever done to protect their position. Fires rage as the Mexica shoot their flaming arrows at all wooden objects, bashing the walls of the temple in a constant barrage.

INT. HOUSE OF AXAYACATL - MORNING

Cortés and his captains are tended to by the Tlascalans. They are virtually covered in dried blood and bruises.

SANDOVAL

(to de Tapia)

How much more can we withstand? We have been trapped in here more than a week. Will they ever cease their taunting?

We hear the loud SHOUTS and TAUNTS from warriors outside the temple, even this early in the day.

DE TAPIA

They wish to drive us mad with their cacophony of noise.

Alvarado stands at an opening in the wall, gazing out over the city.

ALVARADO

It is beginning to work.

CORTÉS

They have adopted our strategies, so it seems.

EXT. HOUSE OF AXAYACATL

A MEXICA SORCERER stands atop a pile of rubble CHANTING curses in Nahuatl at the besieged Spaniards. His long, unkempt hair is matted with dried blood and he is dressed in tattered black robes.

INT. HOUSE OF AXAYACATL

Alvarado grabs a harquebus leaning against the wall and begins loading it.

SANDOVAL

We must do something soon. We are almost out of provisions.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Alvarado cocks the hammer and takes aim out the window with the harquebus.

LUGO

Our fortunes must surely change or  
we are done for.

Alvarado FIRES a single shot. We no longer hear the sorcerer's CHANTING. Cortés summons Sandoval with a wave of his hand.

CORTÉS

Bring Moctezuma to me.

INT. HOUSE OF AXAYACATL

Olid and Sandoval escort Moctezuma over to Cortés.

CORTÉS

Is this Cuitláhuac, the one I  
released, the one who now makes war  
against me?

MOCTEZUMA

It is the very same.

CORTÉS

Talk to those whom you recognize in  
the crowd. Persuade your people to  
cease their attacks. Do this for  
me, for the greater good of your  
people.

MOCTEZUMA

I shall not do it. They no longer  
listen to me. My brother is their  
ruler now.

CORTÉS

As long as the emperor of the  
Mexica is alive, no other ruler can  
be elected in his place. You once  
told me this yourself, Moctezuma.

MOCTEZUMA

That means so very little now.

CORTÉS

(pleading)

Let us repair our friendship. Do  
what I ask of you so that no more  
lives are lost.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MOCTEZUMA

What more does Malinche want of me?  
I neither wish to live, nor to  
listen to him, for to such a pass  
have I come because of him.

Olid and Olmedo intervene, pulling Moctezuma off to the side...

FRIAR OLMEDO

Great Moctezuma, only you can quell  
the fire that threatens to burn out  
of control down there. If you do  
not calm them, I fear this entire  
city shall burn.

EXT. HOUSE OF AXAYACATL - CONTINUOUS

Moctezuma appears on the roof of the temple with his arms outstretched. The mob below can hardly believe their eyes -- their emperor still lives.

MOCTEZUMA

My friends and family that I see  
before me, hear the words which I  
speak to you. I came to live with  
the fair-skinned ones on my own  
accord, and can return to my own  
palace whenever I so choose. I am  
still your emperor, your *huey*  
*tlatoani*. And therefore, there is  
no reason for war! The Christians  
have even agreed to leave the city.

Cauhtémoc appears from amongst the crowd, addressing Moctezuma as well as the mob...

CUAUHTÉMOC

What is that which is being said by  
that scoundrel of a Moctezuma, the  
whore of the Spaniards?

(turns to face the crowd)

Does he think that he can call to  
us, with his woman-like soul, to  
fight for the empire he has  
abandoned out of fright?

(The crowd CHEERS him on)

We do not want to obey him because  
already he is no longer our  
monarch, and indeed, we must give  
him the punishment which we give to  
a wicked man.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The crowd grows rabid, hurling stones not only from below, but from another rooftop above the palace. Olid and Sandoval raise their shields over Moctezuma to protect him.

SANDOVAL  
Get him inside!

Olid lets his shield down briefly, and one by one, three stones strike Moctezuma, two in the chest and one in the head.

INT. HOUSE OF AXAYACATL

Olid and Sandoval drag the unconscious leader into the center of the room.

CORTÉS  
What happened?

OLID  
They struck him with stones.

FRIAR OLMEDO  
Is he still alive?

OLID  
Barely.

Olmedo uses his robe to staunch the bleeding. Moctezuma is out cold.

SANDOVAL  
(to Cortés)  
We'll never get out of here alive!

CORTÉS  
The hell you say, Sandoval! We are not finished yet.

INT. HOUSE OF AXAYACATL - NIGHT

Moctezuma still lies on a bed, barely clinging to life. Olmedo and Díaz sit by his side to administer the last rites. Olmedo gets up and walks over to Cortés.

FRIAR OLMEDO  
He shall not see the morning. Now is the time to speak with him.

Cortés walks over to Moctezuma's side, a genuine sadness covering his face.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CORTÉS

Do you wish to confess your sins,  
and be baptized into the Holy  
Faith?

Moctezuma slowly turns his head towards his captor.

MOCTEZUMA

I wish to spend... my last moments  
on this earth... in the company of  
the gods of my ancestors.

CORTÉS

As you wish, emperor.

MOCTEZUMA

Look after... my three daughters,  
especially... the eldest, as she  
is my heir.

CORTÉS

It shall be done. I wish you to  
know that I forgive you for any  
part you took in connection with my  
enemies. I now know that it was  
Narváez alone who conceived all of  
the treachery against me.

MOCTEZUMA

(straining to speak)  
Perhaps... we shall meet again...  
in the other world... Ma-lin-che.

CORTÉS

Goodbye, my friend. God be with  
your soul.

He makes the sign of the cross over Moctezuma. Moctezuma  
closes his eyes and dies.

ALVARADO

And it is finished. He is dead.

CORTÉS

Gather up the remaining lords here  
with us. Kill them all... now.

INT. ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Alvarado, Sandoval and the other Spaniards take the Mexica  
lords into the empty room and stab them all with their  
swords. WE HEAR the SCREAMS as they all die violently by the  
sword. Friar Díaz tugs on Cortés's arm...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FRIAR DÍAZ

For the love of God, captain, spare  
these men their lives!

CORTÉS

I can longer spare men to guard  
them. There are now more bodies  
available to help us fight for our  
survival.

FRIAR DÍAZ

But this is murder, Cortés!

CORTÉS

(shoving him away)  
This is war, brother! And this is  
our Blessed Lord providing us with  
an opportunity to save our very  
lives!

ALONSO DE ÁVILA intercepts Cortés as he passes by...

ÁVILA

Cortés...

CORTÉS

(cuts him off)  
I am busy.

ÁVILA

This you must hear, Captain!

He grabs Botello and drags him into view.

ÁVILA (CONT'D)

(to Botello)  
Go on, tell him what you have told  
me!

CORTÉS

(turning around)  
Make it fast, Botello.

BOTELLO

As you know, Captain, I am in touch  
with a variety of spirits...

CORTÉS

Out with it, man!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

BOTELLO

They have informed me that if we do not leave this place tonight... we shall all be killed.

EXT. COURTYARD - LATER

Moctezuma's body is carried by two Spaniards outside of the gate to the palace and dumped on the ground. They hurry back inside and lock the gate. Out of the shadows several Mexica warriors come forth and drag away the body of their emperor.

INT. HOUSE OF AXAYACATL

Cortés summons Alvarado and Sandoval off to the side.

CORTÉS

I have decided we leave tonight. There is no time to waste.

SANDOVAL

You cannot be serious?

CORTÉS

We have little food, almost no gunpowder for the cannon guarding this palace, and out of all the Tlascalans that returned with me fewer than a hundred are left.

ALVARADO

No, no, Sandoval... it is perfect. They would never expect us to leave by night.

CORTÉS

Yes, they will mourn their emperor and prepare his funeral. There is no other time for us to take advantage of such a great distraction. So calmly begin informing your men to pack the weapons and come to meet in an hour's time.

EXT. TEMPLE DISTRICT

Mexica Priests carry Moctezuma's body on their shoulders. They pass through the busiest streets so that mourners can pay their last respects to their emperor.

## INT. HOUSE OF AXAYACATL

The Spaniards are gathering up their immense treasure of gold and jewels for transport. Cortés passes through the throng of men, inspecting their progress...

CORTÉS

Anything that is not the king's share you may take with you. Take as much as you like, but you shall carry it yourselves.

The men fill bags and bags worth of the gold alone. The Tlascalans help themselves to the quetzal feathers and headdresses since gold to them has no monetary value.

## INT. CHAMBER

Cortés observes as his majordomo GUZMÁN, and ALONSO DE ESCOBAR pack the king's gold into eight straw boxes. The boxes are then attached to the saddle of a brown mare.

CORTÉS

Remember, Guzmán, guard this with your very life, or we shall all hang.

GUZMÁN

Yes, Captain.

## EXT. TEMPLE

Moctezuma's body burns atop a large funeral pyre. Thousands are gathered to mourn him. Priests ritually cut their earlobes and arms until they bleed as a sign of mourning, and yet another offering to the gods.

## EXT. CAUSEWAY - NIGHT

The Spaniards are gathered at the city-side of the causeway, about to begin their getaway. A light rain is falling.

CORTÉS

I shall ride with the rearguard.

ALVARADO

No, it is better that you go with the vanguard, because there will be more resistance there, and seeing you in the lead everyone will fight better.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CORTÉS

Perhaps you are right.

ALVARADO

These are our lives, Cortés. We shall not have another chance to escape.

CORTÉS

Very well. Sandoval, Ordaz, Acevedo, Tapia and Lugo, you shall join me in the front.

(to Velázquez)

Velázquez, you shall join in command with Alvarado at the rear.

(motions for Escobar and Guzmán to join him at the front)

You two, stay by me. Whatever happens, no matter the cost, we must protect this mare, understood?

(They both answer yes)

Let's move.

The army of less than 500 begins its quiet march out of the grand city. No more than a hundred yards along the way, they have to wait for their bridgelayers, MAGARIÑO and his sixty men, to come forward and assemble a portable bridge.

CORTÉS (CONT'D)

Is it large enough?

MAGARIÑO

Yes. It fits perfectly.

The bridgelayers quickly assemble the bridge and the army crosses over the gap. After they all pass over, the bridgelayers move onward to the next gap in the causeway.

EXT. REARGUARD - CAUSEWAY

AN OLD WOMAN collecting water from the lake in a bucket notices the rearguard of the army...

OLD WOMAN

(in Nahuatl)

Mexica, come quickly! Our enemies are leaving! Now that it is night, they are running away as fugitives!

Alvarado hears the Woman's SCREAMING and gives half a thought to ride back and silence her.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALVARADO

*Hija de puta!* She is giving us  
away!

VELÁZQUEZ DE LEÓN

Leave her be, it is too late to  
stop her now.

EXT. NEAR THE CAUSEWAY

Several warriors are roused by the Woman's shouts and come out of hiding. They CALL to others to bring weapons and canoes.

EXT. TEMPLE OF HUITZILOPOCHTLI

A warrior runs to the drums used during sacrifices and begins BEATING as fiercely and loudly as he can to waken the city.

EXT. TEMPLE DISTRICT

Soon enough hundreds of warriors are gathered awaiting the commands of their generals.

EXT. VANGUARD - CAUSEWAY

The army marches onward even as WE HEAR the warriors SHOUTING from the distance.

ORDAZ

We will never escape them now!

SANDOVAL

Shut up, Ordaz! We have to keep  
moving is all.

CORTÉS

Let us hope and pray that the  
Blessed Virgin has mercy upon us.  
After all, this gold is for her  
glory.

LUGO

(whispering to de Tapia)  
I thought it was all for his glory.

EXT. TEMPLE COURTYARD

A WAR PRIEST stands at the head of a thousand angry Jaguar and Eagle Warriors.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WAR PRIEST

(in Nahuatl)

Mexican chiefs, your enemies, the  
Teules are leaving, run to your  
canoes of war!

The warriors SHOUT with one voice as they stream off through  
the streets to their various battle stations.

WAR PRIEST (CONT'D)

(in Nahuatl)

Huitzilopochtli requires flesh and  
blood from each and every one of  
you!

EXT. VANGUARD - CAUSEWAY

The vanguard is stopped as the bridgelayers cover up yet  
another gap.

SANDOVAL

How much longer till land, Cortés?

CORTÉS

I am not sure. We can only move so  
fast.

De Tapia is staring off across the lake. He sees the canoes  
coming for them...

DE TAPIA

They are on the lake, Captain! To  
our left.

Cortés turns his head and sees what De Tapia is seeing. Ten  
canoes filled with warriors heading straight for them.

LUGO

On the other side as well!

More canoes close in on the opposite side of the causeway.

CORTÉS

As best you can, comrades.  
Remember how far you have come!

A HAIL OF ARROWS strikes the vanguard from both sides as the  
warriors let loose. Then the arrows stop as the canoes close  
in swiftly, the warriors grab as many men as they can,  
dragging them into the water. The warriors club them to  
death with their obsidian-bladed *macuahuitls*.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CORTÉS (CONT'D)  
Magariño! Are you finished?

MAGARIÑO  
Not yet!

CORTÉS  
We are coming forward!  
(to the men)  
Move out!

The vanguard pushes on even though the gap is still open -- they have no choice. The canoes pull up to both sides of the Causeway and offload the fearsome Jaguar and Eagle Warriors -- decked-out in their animal skins. The fighting is hand-to-hand, and as brutal as it comes.

EXT. REARGUARD - CAUSEWAY

The fighting is even more severe at the back. Alvarado fights from horseback until his mount is speared by a Jaguar Warrior. He jumps off before his horse falls into the lake.

Velázquez De León does his best to hold off the fierce Jaguars, but he is surrounded and clubbed, his body dragged away into the crowd to be sacrificed later.

ALVARADO  
Velázquez! Velázquez!

It is hopeless. He fights on like a madman before abandoning the cause.

ALVARADO (CONT'D)  
(to his men)  
Every man for himself! Fight for  
your lives!

Botello fights bravely until he is overwhelmed and hauled away for sacrificial purposes. The rest of Alvarado's men are killed and thrown into the lake, the pack animals, horses and all.

EXT. VANGUARD - CAUSEWAY

Cortés, Sandoval and Ordaz make it to the portable bridge. Dozens of his men are either killed or captured.

CORTÉS  
(to Ordaz)  
The gold! Where is Guzmán?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ORDAZ  
He is with Lugo.

CORTÉS  
(out of breath)  
Sandoval, go with Ordaz... we  
cannot lose the gold!

Sandoval and Ordaz take off immediately in search of Lugo.

EXT. MIDDLE OF CAUSEWAY

Guzmán, Escobar and Lugo are fighting for their lives. Guzmán is too distracted by his task to defend the mare and its cargo. Lugo kills several Eagle Warriors, but their numbers are keep growing.

LUGO  
Guzmán, move on!

GUZMÁN  
I cannot, sir. We are surrounded!

Sandoval and Ordaz stampede the warriors from horseback, knocking several off them off the Causeway.

SANDOVAL  
(to Guzmán)  
Go now, we shall cover you!  
(to Lugo)  
There is only one more bridge to  
cross.

LUGO  
We are on our way!

Sandoval and Ordaz ride on to assist the Tlascalans holding the center of their forces. The rearguard is now completely decimated. Guzmán and Escobar make it thirty feet or so when a canoe pulls alongside them and warriors jump out. They are overtaken and thrown into the canoe as prisoners. The mare becomes frightened as retreating Spaniards, Tlascalans and advancing Mexica storm passed her, knocking her and the king's untold riches into the dark depths of Texcoco.

EXT. VANGUARD - CAUSEWAY

Now the wounded Alvarado appears on foot with only two of his men in tow.

CORTÉS  
Where are the people with whom I  
left you?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALVARADO  
 Captain, all of them are here and  
 if some are not, forget them!

CORTÉS  
 (angrily)  
 Damn you, Pedrito!

He grabs Alvarado by his cotton armor...

ALVARADO  
 All is lost, Hernando... but still  
 we live!

Sandoval and Ordaz arrive with the stragglers from the center and the rear. What's left of the Castilian army arrives onto the momentary safety of land. The Mexica do not pursue their foe any further than the end of the Causeway.

EXT. LAKESHORE

Cortés takes count of the survivors, looking for one in particular...

CORTÉS  
 (to the men)  
 Martín López! Has anyone seen  
 Martín López?

López's worth as the shipbuilder is incalculable.

CORTÉS (CONT'D)  
 López!

GARRIDO  
 He is here, captain! But he is  
 badly wounded!

Cortés pushes his way through his wounded and exhausted men over to Garrido. He is almost delirious.

CORTÉS  
 Where is Martín López?

Garrido holds Cortés still so he can see that López is safe and alive. The Friars Olmedo and Díaz are there as well.

CORTÉS (CONT'D)  
 (touching López's face)  
 Thanks be to God, Martino, you are  
 alive... you very skillful and  
 clever man.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He kisses López on the forehead. Malinalli and Aguilar are present and accounted for, as are the Alvarado Brothers, Sandoval, Ordaz, Rangel, Olid, Garrido, De Tapia, Lugo and the majority of his bravest men.

CORTÉS (CONT'D)

Well, let us go... for we lack nothing.

The silence is deafening as no one is in any condition to object or dissent. Cortés' resolve is as fiery as ever before. He pauses for a moment then starts marching uphill.

EXT. DESERTED TEMPLE - NIGHT

In the pouring rain the Spaniards come across a large, deserted temple in the middle of the forest. They set up their camp here.

INT. HUT - NIGHT

Tlascalan shamans tend to Cortés's numerous wounds. Malinalli holds his bloodied head in her lap, a nasty, gaping wound visible on the side of his head. Cortés is near death, slipping in and out of consciousness. Alvarado enters to check on his captain.

ALVARADO

(to Aguilar)

Will he live?

AGUILAR

I believe so. He is too mean to die.

ALVARADO

(smiling)

Perhaps the Virgin's favor truly is with him, after all.

AGUILAR

How are the men?

ALVARADO

As well as can be. We lost well over four hundred men.

GARRIDO

Five hundred by my count.

ALVARADO

(to Aguilar)

Inform me when he awakens.

EXT. TEMPLE OF HUITZILOPOCHTLI - DAY

Despite the tremendous loss of life of their warrior class, the Mexica hold a lavish celebration in honor of the flight of the Spaniards. Today is a day of sacrifice, and all the captured Castilians are hauled up to the temple mount to be butchered before Huitzilopochtli.

Heart after heart is viciously cut out of the chest of the unfortunate survivors as the citizenry SHOUT and CHEER with blood-curdling ecstasy. The Priests display the severed heads on the three-tiered skull rack called the *tzompontli*. It is covered in blood by the freshly cut heads of its foreign victims. The dead bodies are hurled to the bottom of the pyramid where butchers sever their limbs.

EXT. TEMPLE OF HUITZILOPOCHTLI - LATER

The newly appointed emperor CUITLÁHUAC delivers a speech before his subjects.

CUITLÁHUAC

And now O lord, o our lord, our  
lord of the nigh, of the near,  
causeth the sun to shine, to  
bringeth the dawn. It is thou, he  
pointeth the finger at thee, he  
indicateth thee. Our lord hath  
recorded thee, entered thee in the  
books.

(pause)

Now verily it was declared, it was  
determined above us in the heavens,  
in the land of the dead, that our  
lord place thee on the reed mat, on  
the reed seat, on his place of  
honor. The spine, the maguey, of  
thy progenitors, of thy great-  
grandfathers, which they planted,  
which they placed in the earth as  
they departed... sprouteth...  
flowereth...

The great throng of Mexica CHEER wildly at the strengthening words of their new leader.

INT. HUT - MORNING

Cortés is propped up in his bed and looking far better than the day before. Alvarado enters to check on his progress.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALVARADO

I see that you are in good spirits,  
Captain.

CORTÉS

Much better, thank you. How are  
the men, Pedrito? Tell me what  
they are saying?

ALVARADO

They say that they are thankful to  
be alive and that they cannot wait  
to see the shores of Spain again.

CORTÉS

Well, they shall have to wait  
awhile longer. Hear me,  
Alvarado... I see our defeat on the  
sad night as nothing more than a  
setback.

ALVARADO

Hernando...

CORTÉS

(cuts him off)

And I shall deliver Tenochtitlan to  
the king of Spain as I have  
promised, and at any, and all  
costs.

ALVARADO

This I believe, but I do not  
understand.

CORTÉS

What great leader or nation has not  
suffered at least one defeat in its  
time? Do you think that Caesar or  
Alexander would view such an  
incident as a true loss? Do you  
believe that they would give up in  
the face of such a test?

ALVARADO

No.

CORTÉS

Then there you have it, Pedrito. I  
am not giving up this prize.

(getting out of bed)

We move onward.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CORTÉS (CONT'D)

First we shall rest and recover in Tlaxcala, and then we shall discuss what our next move shall be.

EXT. WOODS OUTSIDE TEMPLE - DAY

Cortés is flanked by Alvarado and Sandoval. The invaluable shipwright, Martín López, is there with him too.

CORTÉS

López, proceed at once to the city of Tlaxcala with your tools, and everything necessary, and seek a place where you can cut much wood, oak evergreen and pine, then fashion it into the pieces necessary to build thirteen brigantines.

MARTÍN LÓPEZ

Brigantines, sir?

CORTÉS

Yes. I am not finished with my mission by any means.

MARTÍN LÓPEZ

And what exactly is your mission, caudillo?

CORTÉS

Either to take back Tenochtitlan, or destroy it.

MONTAGE - THE BUILDING OF THE SHIPS

-- EXT. WOODS - DAY -- Martín López supervises the shipwrights underneath his command as they chop down the massive trees in the pristine Mexican jungle with the help of their Tlascalan allies.

-- EXT. WOODS - DAY -- The shipwrights and Tlascalans stack the massive trunks of the trees horizontally in a pile for cutting.

-- EXT. WOODS - DAY -- The tree trunks are sawed into sections.

-- EXT. WOODS - DAY -- The shipwrights begin assembling the wood into the frameworks for the thirteen brigantines.

-- EXT. WOODS - DAY -- Cortés walks with Martín López, as López shows him the rapid progress of the shipbuilding.

END OF MONTAGE

INT. MOCTEZUMA'S CHAMBER - NIGHT

Cuitláhuac lies dying in bed of smallpox. His family and servants are gathered around his bed. The Priests utter their prayers in silence by the golden incense braziers.

CUITLÁHUAC

(weakly)

How swiftly I have been laid low.

COYOUEUETZIN

This great rash is unknown to us, my lord. It is the curse of Malinche and the fair-skinned ones. They are a filthy race.

CUITLÁHUAC

(weakly)

Yes, but the curse is against us. We die, as they live. How many have died?

COYOUEUETZIN

We are unable to keep count of the dead. Many thousands, at least, my lord.

CUITLÁHUAC

Send to me Cuauhtémoc.

The Priest turns to CUAUHTÉMOC who stands in the corner. He waves his hands at him to come over. His cousin Cuauhtémoc is the one Cuitláhuac chooses to succeed him.

CUITLÁHUAC (CONT'D)

Place your faith in the wise men of our realm, for a wise man is a light, a torch that does not smoke... and a mirror, pierced on both sides.

(coughing)

The wise man knows what is above us, and what is in the region of the dead.

CUAUHTÉMOC

I understand.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CUITLÁHUAC

Let them comfort the heart, give  
remedies, and most of all... heal  
everyone.

He coughs uncontrollably then passes away. Cuauhtémoc is now  
the emperor of the Mexica.

EXT. SPANISH CAMP - DAY

Cortés and López look at the impressive ships before them,  
ready to be transported to the valley of Mexico.

CORTÉS

You have outdone yourself this  
time, López.

MARTÍN LÓPEZ

This is why you brought me with  
you, captain.

CORTÉS

Indeed it is.

MARTÍN LÓPEZ

Now you shall be able to enter the  
city by water.

CORTÉS

These ships shall allow me to do a  
great many things.

EXT. TEMPLE OF HUITZILOPOCHTLI - NIGHT

Cuauhtémoc stands before the Electors who officially anoint  
him *huey tlatoani*. Incense burns heavily during the  
ceremony.

ELECTOR

We are rich feathers from the wings  
of those splendid turkeys, the past  
kings, jewels, and precious stones  
have fallen from the throats and  
wrists of those royal men.

(beat)

Behold, the eyebrows and the  
lashes, which have fallen from the  
courageous sovereigns of Mexico.  
Extend your hands to the one who  
pleases you!

Cuauhtémoc follows his orders.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ELECTOR (CONT'D)

Now thou art deified!

(circling him)

Although thou art human, as we are,  
 although thou art our friend,  
 although thou art our son, no more  
 art thou human, as we are, we do  
 not look to thee as human.

(beat)

Huitzilopochtli speaketh forth from  
 thy mouth, thou art his lips, his  
 jaw, his tongue, his ears!

The Elector places a Priest's robe on Cuauhtémoc, who then stands before the effigy of Huitzilopochtli where he offers the god incense. The other Electors blow their conch shells announcing the end of the ritual. One by one they approach the effigy and offer it their share of incense.

EXT. MOUNTAINS - EVENING

The Spanish assisted by their Tlascalans drag the THIRTEEN DISASSEMBLED BOATS through the woods with pulleys and the aid of the horses.

EXT. LAKE TEXCOCO - DAY

Cortés' men are assembling the boats on the undefended shore. Five of the boats are already afloat in the water.

SANDOVAL

Why are there no patrols?

CORTÉS

You give them too much credit,  
 Gonzalo. They do not think as we  
 do.

SANDOVAL

This is far too easy. Something is  
 not right.

ALVARADO

They truly believe we have left for  
 good, Sandoval. And this is why we  
 shall overcome them.

ALVARADO (CONT'D)

(to Cortés)

Are you certain this is what you  
 want?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CORTÉS

Would you have come this far and  
suffered this much if you did not  
know the answer?

ALVARADO

Let us make this one count, then.

CORTÉS

Load the boats. We sail at sunset.

EXT. LAKESHORE

The Tlascalans carefully load the boats onto the water. The  
various crews take their places inside the boats.

EXT. TEMPLE COURTYARD - EVENING

Cauhtémoc addresses the population of his great city.

CUAUHTÉMOC

O brave Mexicans, you have seen how  
all our old subjects have rebelled  
against us! Our enemies used to be  
Tlaxcala, Cholula and Huexotzinco,  
but now we must also face Texcoco,  
Chalco, Xochimilco and even Tacuba!  
(beat)

So remember the bold hearts of the  
Mexica-Chichimeca, our ancestors  
who, though few in number, dared to  
enter this land and to conquer it.  
Therefore, O Mexica, do not be  
dismayed or be cowardly. On the  
contrary, strengthen your chests  
and your hearts... and do not scorn  
me because of my youth!

The people hail their new leader with wild CHEERING and  
HOWLING that we hear all the way...

EXT. LAKESHORE - CONTINUOUS

... at the Spanish camp by the shore.

LUGO

*Madre de Dios.* They know we are  
coming.

DE TAPIA

They will discover this fact  
eventually, what is a few hours  
difference going to make?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARÍA DE ESTRADA

Enough time for them to set up  
adequate defences. Who knows what  
truly lies beyond this water now.

Sandoval enters behind the group to offer his two-cents  
worth.

SANDOVAL

Glory and riches beyond our wildest  
dreams...

(beat)

... or death.

EXT. HILL OF CHAPULTEPEC - SPRING - EVENING

Alvarado and a group of Spaniards destroy the impressive  
aqueduct connecting the freshwater spring to Tenochtitlan.  
This is the only source of fresh water for the Mexica.

The Tlascalans get bucketfuls of water from the spring before  
damming it up with dirt and rocks. The siege of the Mexican  
capital is underway.

EXT. LAKE TEXCOCO

The 13 brigantines slowly sail across the placid evening  
water. Each boat has a cannon onboard and they are rowed  
by the Tlascalans. Thirty-one or more men travel on these  
boats -- footsoldiers and crossbowmen -- while others prepare  
a land attack of the Mexica allies in the hills bordering the  
lake. The brigantines split up in four different directions -  
- each group heading towards the four Causeways.

EXT. MAIN CAUSEWAY

Cortés' boat pulls up alongside the deserted bridge and his  
men deboard.

CORTÉS

(to Martín López)

Stay with the boat, Martín. Await  
my signal, yes?

MARTÍN LÓPEZ

Yes, Captain.

Cortés and his men quietly advance along the Causeway towards  
the main gate to the city.

## EXT. HILLSIDE

Alvarado and his men continue down the hill towards the Tacuba Causeway.

## EXT. COYOACÁN CAUSEWAY

Olid has as his lieutenants De Tapia, Francisco Verdugo, Francisco De Lugo and other Castilians and Tlascalans.

## EXT. IZTAPALAPA CAUSEWAY

Sandoval and his men arriving there are: PEDRO DE IRCIO and LUIS MARÍN along with other Spaniards and Tlascalans.

## EXT. GATE OF THE EAGLE - TENOCHTITLAN

Cortés and his men make their way towards the city's entrance under heavy arrow fire and rocks propelled at them by catapults. There is a fierce fight between the Tlascalans and the Mexica, with the Spaniards steadily pushing forward.

## EXT. MEXICA BARRICADE - DAY

The Tlascalans are halted at a large barricade erected across the street. Both armies remain on their side of the obstacle. Sandoval arrives with his men and the Tlascalans point to the large barricade made of wood, rubble, even dead bodies.

A JAGUAR WARRIOR appears atop the barricade, pointing to the temple where their kinsmen are taken to be sacrificed. The sacrifices continue despite the city being a warzone. He shouts at them in Nahuatl:

JAGUAR WARRIOR

(shouting)

Look! That is the way you will all die, as our gods have many times promised us!

He is handed two lances and a shield. He tosses them at the Tlascalans, who back away in fear. Then the Jaguar Warrior throws a black, roasted leg at them.

JAGUAR WARRIOR (CONT'D)

(in Nahuatl)

Eat the flesh of these Teules and of your brothers, for we are gluttoned with it. You can stuff yourselves on our leavings!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Sandoval is disgusted at the site of the cooked, half-eaten leg of one of his comrades.

JAGUAR WARRIOR (CONT'D)

(to the Tlascalans)

Now see these houses you have pulled down. We shall make you build them again, much finer, with stone and fine masonry.

(beat)

So go on helping the Teules. You will see them all sacrificed!

EXT. GATE OF THE EAGLE - NIGHT

Cortés and his men are fighting for their lives. They are surrounded and vastly outnumbered. As they retreat back from the gate they approach the breach behind them on the Causeway. The Mexica want Cortés, so they head straight for him, knocking him off his horse and spearing him in the thigh. Cortés falls wounded into the muddy breach. Cortés is unable to defend himself or get free of the mud.

CRISTOBAL DE OLEA

Caudillo!

He runs over and grabs Cortés by his cotton armor, dragging him out of the breach to the other side of the Causeway.

CORTÉS

Get the men out of here!

Two other soldiers take Cortés off to safety as Olea fights and kills four Mexica warriors. He is then quickly surrounded by several more. He is struck across the head with the deadly *macuahuitl*, spraying blood, brains and bone into the air.

CORTÉS (CONT'D)

Cristobal! No!

Guzmán is dragged away by his legs to be used for sacrifice, SCREAMING his lungs out. The rest of the Castilians are slaughtered at the Gate.

CORTÉS (CONT'D)

(hysterical)

The breach! We have to fill the breach!

Wounded and defeated, Cortés lets his men haul him off to their barricade. They have gained absolutely no ground after several days of fighting.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Sandoval and his men build barricades around their position as the Tlascalans hold off the skirmishing Mexica.

PEDRO DE IRCIO

Every night we construct these barricades, and every day they destroy them. What is the use?

SANDOVAL

Do you wish to find out as you sleep with one eye open, de Ircio?

PEDRO DE IRCIO

I already do.

EXT. TEMPLE OF TLATELOLCO - DAY

Alvarado's men hold off the defenders of the temple long enough for Alvarado to break through with Cortés' flag, still the blue cross but on a yellow background instead of white, and he makes it to the top where he plants the flag.

EXT. STREET

Cortés watches as the flag blows in the wind atop the temple. This is the very boost that he and his men need to encourage them.

EXT. CAUSEWAY - DAY

Cortés defiantly, if foolishly, walks toward the Mexica position behind a large barricade of rubble. A MEXICA WARRIOR appears atop the barricade, pointing at Cortés with his bow.

MEXICA WARRIOR

Come in, Malinche. Come in and take your pleasure!

Cortés continues, unafraid of the consequences.

MEXICA WARRIOR (CONT'D)

Do you think that there is another Moctezuma to let you do what you please?

CORTÉS

Are you mad? Do you wish to be destroyed? Is there not a lord of the city to whom I can speak?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The warrior laughs, pointing to the dozens of other Mexica now standing atop the barricade alongside him.

MEXICA WARRIOR

We are all lords, so you can say  
what you want to any one of us.

Lugo is now right behind Cortés, should he need support.

LUGO

You shall soon die of hunger, all  
of you!

MEXICA WARRIOR

When we are in need of food, we  
shall eat you and the Tlascalan  
friends.

The other Mexica laugh loudly, taunting the two Castilians. Another warrior throws some maize tortillas from atop the barricade that land in front of Cortés.

MEXICA WARRIOR (CONT'D)

Take and eat this if you are  
hungry! We are in no need of it!

CORTÉS

(to Lugo)  
Damn them.

LUGO

We should fall back now. If they  
attack us we shall be no match.

CORTÉS

They truly want me to destroy them,  
and this beautiful city along with  
them.

Lugo takes Cortés by the arm, pulling him away faster, but the Mexica do not pursue.

CORTÉS (CONT'D)

(to Lugo)  
Find Sandoval and Alvarado... tell  
them to burn the city down.

EXT. CITY STREETS - LATER

Alvarado and his men fight street by street with the Mexica. As they advance into the Temple District, they pass women and children dying of starvation in the streets.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The majority of the dying eat grass, even leather, anything to fill their aching bellies. The dead are lying in piles everywhere.

Alvarado's men set fire to every building as they pass by, kicking in the doors and tossing torches inside. Within minutes large fires are spreading out among the thatched roof houses. The dead and rotting corpses bloat in the heat. The casualties of women and children are greater than the warriors.

EXT. TEMPLE DISTRICT

Cortés and his men mop up the leftover resistance. Tenochtitlan is more or less his. All that is left is for Cuauhtémoc to surrender.

EXT. LAKE TEXCOCO - NIGHT

Cuauhtémoc, his wife and his remaining advisors sail off from the harbor by the cover of darkness. Sandoval and his men arrive just as they are leaving.

SANDOVAL

Man the boats!

His men scurry to the nearest canoe. The marksman Pedro Barba is with him.

SANDOVAL (CONT'D)

(pointing to the canoe)

Barba!

Barba steps up with his harquebus and FIRES two shots -- the first one hits the water, the second one hits the canoe and wounds one of the Mexica. Cuauhtémoc stands up, waving his hands.

CUAUHTÉMOC

(in Nahuatl)

Stop! I am Cuauhtémoc, the emperor, we have women and children with us!

PEDRO BARBA

What is he saying?

SANDOVAL

Hold your fire. They have surrendered.

The Spaniards steer their canoe alongside them. Cuauhtémoc and his men surrender.

EXT. TEMPLE DISTRICT

CORTÉS P.O.V.

He walks in a dream-like state through the carnage taking place all around him. There is silence, only the slightly audible pulse of a dying heartbeat, as he observes the consequences of his decision. In front of him the Tlascalans exact their revenge upon the weak and the young, raping girls in the street and cutting open the stomachs of the elderly, letting their guts spill out on to the stone pavement.

The heartbeat beats slower now...

The Spaniards set fire to very building still left standing. Everywhere is death, destruction, pillaging, violation and massacre... all of it upon the orders of a weary Cortés.

The heartbeat has almost stopped...

Cortés stands in the middle of a plaza, surrounded by Tlascalans butchering Mexica, Spaniards killing Mexica, burning building collapsing all around them. We move in a great circle, swirling around the chaos faster and faster until we center in on Cortés -- alone in the world at this moment -- alone with his guilt and sorrow. Tears drip from his eyes as the fifth sun departs to declare a new ruler in this realm of the world.

EXT. TEMPLE COURTYARD - DAY

Cuauhtémoc is brought before Cortés bound in ropes. He is weak from exhaustion and hunger. He points to the sword hanging from Cortés's side -- he wishes to be killed instead of being kept a humiliated prisoner.

CUAUHTEMOC

(in Nahuatl)

I have done everything in my power  
to defend my country and keep it  
out of your hands, Malinche. And  
now since my luck has not been  
good, I beg you to end my life.

MALINALLI

He begs of you to end his life,  
that he might die an honorable  
death.

Cortés touches the hilt of the sword, but refuses the young emperor the satisfaction of death.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CORTÉS

I hold you in high esteem all the more for having defended the city with such courage and steadfastness. I only wish that the emperor had made peace, before so much was destroyed.

Malinalli translates in Nahuatl:

CORTÉS (CONT'D)

You should rest now, soon enough you shall be able to rule over your empire as before.

He turns away and ignores the young ruler, tending to the affairs of his captains instead.

ALVARADO

You need rest, Cortés. Your work is done here.

CORTÉS

May God have mercy on my soul for the decisions I have made.

ALVARADO

May God have mercy on all of our souls.

EXT. CAUSEWAY - DAY

Fires smolder all around as Tenochtitlan continues burning from the Spanish fury. Friar Díaz comes over to join Cortés...

FRIAR DÍAZ

I am reminded of Boabdil in this moment, caudillo.

CORTÉS

How so?

FRIAR DÍAZ

He loved fair Granada so much that he had not preferred to see it destroyed rather than give it over to King Ferdinand.

CORTÉS

This is not what I wanted. I tried to spare the people, and the city.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FRIAR DÍAZ

So tell me, Hernando... has it been worth it to you? All this death, and waste?

CORTÉS

We both have our roles to play in this life, brother. I have merely performed my part.

(looks him in the eye)

And you?

FRIAR DÍAZ

Oh, yes. You have provided me with enough souls to pray for the rest of my natural life and onwards.

CORTÉS

Then shouldn't you be busy doing that instead of pestering me?

EXT. TEMPLE COURTYARD - MORNING

Cortés and his captains attend a Mass led by Friar Olmedo.

EXT. MAIN BOULEVARD - TENOCHTITLAN - DAY

Friar Olmedo leads the entire remaining force of Spaniards in a procession through the desolate streets of the city. He carries an image of the Virgin Mary upon a banner, with the other priests following behind him singing the *Te Deum*.

Friar Díaz carries a large wooden cross. Cortés marches behind them with his closest captains and then the rest of the conquistadors behind him. WE ZOOM OUT, UP AND OVER the triumphant army as it marches towards the still smoldering Temple of Huitzilopochtli.

FADE OUT:

THE END