

The Burning Aztec Sun

by

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This is the story of Mexico, but of a Mexico that you may not know of. Long before you were born or your grandparents were born or their great great grandparents: **this is the Mexico of the Aztecs.**

Citlali relished the feeling of the sun blaring on his face. He loved the warmth of the morning sun and wanted to soak in the power of Quetzalcoatl, the Sun god. However, he woke up with a start and jumped up stretching. He was tall and slender, with the silkiest of hazel hair with matching eyes. He grabbed a piece of maize to chew at as he left his hut, and started walking to the cliff towering over the mighty sea. Citlali sat down at the edge of the overhang and wondered what was out there. He looked at the clear blue water lapping up at the bottom of the rocky wall. The 17-year-old was happy at home. But then he saw something on the great big blue, something different; something he had never seen before. He thought it was the house of Chalchiuhtlicue, the Goddess of Water. But the galleon had passed beyond the horizon before he could understand this mystification.

Pedro woke in the barracks within the bustling port town of Puerto de Carenas. He had heard the news that Francisco Hernandez's ships had set sail. Pedro had wished he had gone with that fleet. He was a tall and skinny boy of 19. He had left Spain two years ago to join the Spanish military. Pedro had pale blue eyes with golden hair. He could hardly hold a gun let alone shoot; he would miss a wall at 10 yards. He was very knowledgeable though; he knew something about pretty much everything. Pedro saw that Alfonso was already awake. He was the camp bully with Rodrigo, Diego and Juan. They were all well-built and strong, and liked terrorising the others. Alfonso stood in the doorway and Pedro walked forward, accepting his grim fate. Alfonso punched Pedro in the stomach, sniggering. He fell on the stone floor, realizing that that would leave a mark. But then Sancho, one of the most respected soldiers, came in to awake his comrades. Alfonso ran off as everyone was scared of Sancho, all but Pedro.

“He did it again; you alright?” Sancho sympathised as his soft brown hair glistened in the sun, and his hazel eyes gazed into Pedro’s.

“You’ll be fine,” he said.

Pedro had always been Sancho’s favourite, so when the huge galleon sailed from the port, its next destination set for the New World, he made sure that he and Pedro would embark on this new adventure together.

Stalking his prey, Citlali had his bow set on the jaguar, its beautiful golden fur and black spots attracted Citlali to it like a bee to a flower. He pulled the bowstring to his cheek and sent the arrow whistling; the arrow hit its mark in the middle of the jaguar’s chest. This didn’t kill the beast though and it came straight at Citlali. He shot again to prevent the jaguar from reaching him, but he missed. He dropped his bow and reached out for his club. With his eyes closed, he struck out wildly and yet somehow caught the pouncing beast on the side of his bone-crushing jaw and actually struck him dead. He walked back to his house with the beautiful beast over his shoulder. Meztli, his father stood in the field tending to his crop.

“You should be helping your father Citlali,” his mother said, “He’s got a sore back.” His mother Sacnite had the same facial features and hair as her son but she had a very stern look, whereas his father was a kind man with a dark, furrowed face.

“Ohhhh my Quetzalcoatl, the house of the Gods is here!!!”

They turned as one as they heard the shriek. Citlali looked at the sea, there it was! It was the same thing that he saw last time.

“The House of Chalhiuhtlicue.” A crowd was gathering on the beach; some were happy to see the galleons, a message from the Gods; others were panicking. Just as everyone was trying to make sense of this divine spectacle, the fleet went out of view, behind a family of large Jacaranda trees. As everyone began to discuss the event, Citlali continued to follow the vessels along the coast creeping secretly away. But a few of his friends spotted him scrambling away from the crowd. Ohtli and Noplaltzin started following him, albeit at a distance. The flotilla drifted slowly but surely out at sea with Citlali keeping pace on the coast. He didn’t quite know why but he was trying to keep a shield of greenery between him and these otherworldly crafts. The two boys ran at a sprint trying to catch-up with Citlali and ended up panting as loud as dogs when they reached him finally. They had almost arrived at:

“Tabasco!” Ohtli exclaimed, “It’s not worth going in.” And the two boys turned back towards home.

Pedro had witnessed an astounding site on landing in Yucatan, Mexico.

“No one will leave; there is no way back, we will stay and conquer!” Cortes had commanded, burning his galleons to smouldering pieces of insignificant debris.

“He’s not allowed to conquer, the Governor had ordered,” one man whispered in Pedro’s ear.

“I don’t care what the governor said, Señor Cortes does what he wants!” he replied impatiently.

They had charged into the town of Tabasco, shouting and screaming, firing their guns, BANG!! BANG!!! He could see people cowering in their huts; the dead lay in the streets and blood splattered everywhere.

This bloodshed only ended when one old, wise-looking man had begged for peace, for the killings to stop. He asked the price for peace. Pedro sat on his horse and stared wide-eyed at this strange barter. “How cowardly are these silly people?” he thought. He was wondering what Cortes would trade when the Señor said the two words, the two words that would change the course of history:

“Information, Women.”

Pedro looked at him perplexed, “Why women and information? Why not gold?”

Citlali saw them as he was peering from a bush; “It must be Quetzalcoatl but how can there be so many, it has to be the God’s magic.” He had seen the fleet on the sea go up in flames a short while ago. Citlali was desperate to know why Quetzalcoatl had unleashed his wrath upon his own fleet. Fleetingly, he saw them through the trees, flying on four legs although they looked not too different from him at the top, except they donned the shiny skin of the Gods. They charged into the town of Tabasco, shouting and screaming. BANG!! BANG!!! The thunder was unleashed from the sticks in the Gods’ hand. The chieftain of Tabasco begged them to halt the thunder, and for peace he agreed to give the men twenty women and tell them anything they wanted to know. There, it was settled; knowledge for peace.

“The Tabascons must have told them everything;” he thought, “everyone knows our enemies, our capital and our King: Montezuma II.” Although the men spoke a new tongue, they could understand most of what was told. They took the offering and rode off. Citlali tried to follow them, always careful to keep to the woods for cover. It was a struggle to keep pace with the Gods when they moved so fast on their 4-legged unearthly creatures. He had discovered that these stately black animals were actually a lot like deer and moved quite like them as well. He knew he had to spend a few more days following these ethereal beings.

A few days they had spent, riding their black creatures. Citlali was very amused watching such weird animals. He could not imagine how they could allow men who were much smaller and undoubtedly weaker to ride them. Maybe the men were Gods or at least Gods minions. However, he had his doubts. These men were just like any other men, except for their thunder sticks and shining hard clothing. Citlali followed the shiny men on their black creatures until all of sudden he was on top of a hill and could see for miles. Far on the horizon he could make out the Aztec city of Veracruz. The black creatures with their masters approached the town. A few hundred eagle warriors, one of the most feared warriors in Central America, stood in front of the shiny people. They charged towards them bravely and disappeared in a thousand BANGS! It was all finished in a single cloud of dust. It was a massacre: hundreds of elite warriors lost their lives. By the time the sun set, the town was part of the Spanish Empire. Much to the surprise of Citlali the men spent much time walking in groups and moving to shouted commands. These people were not Gods, Citlali was convinced. He stayed in the hills and fended for himself, whilst the men stayed at Veracruz. After a few weeks of this, 400 men marched off leaving 100 behind in the now Spanish town. Citlali followed them at a distance and as they reached Cempoala he witnessed them forge an alliance in order to avoid any bloodshed. Then off to Jalapa they went and onwards to Cofre de Perote and Xocotla. Massacres at these places made up for the lack of spilt blood at Cempoala. At Ixtacmaxtitlan, even more killings took place and every night Citlali would sit sobbing silently by his fire, horrified by the images of the day. Out of sheer curiosity and thirst for knowledge, he continued to follow the shiny men and when they reached Tlaxcala he thought that the Aztecs could finally defeat them. The army killed two horsemen who up until now seemed to be immortal. The Tlaxcalans launched many successful attacks on the Spanish camp, but the Spanish night attacks with their cavalry were proving much more effective. After many-a-day of fighting, Tlaxcala finally surrendered and formed an alliance.

Pedro was lucky as Alfonso couldn't go around picking on him with the general who was in charge of their camp, Cristobal de Olid, watching closely. Pedro didn't take too much notice of the fighting. All he knew was that the Spanish were winning. The Spanish army grew bigger and bigger, especially when they allied with Tlaxcala. At Tlaxcala he went for a few night raids and nearly shot a mother of 3 young children. He was not very proud of himself afterwards but he could see Alfonso bragging as to how he had killed entire families. But for Pedro

nothing much happened in this time from April to August in the year 1519. He had grown increasingly contemptuous of these people who were meekly cowering in front of the small band of conquistadors and not even trying to fight back.

After Tlaxcala they moved to Tenochtitlan. Citlali moved with the army but kept to the shadows. After a few days of travelling he could see the town of Cholula. Citlali watched as the shining men got their *'thunder-sticks'* and killed everyone. That night he sat on a tree bough and, despite his best efforts of being brave and strong, sobbed uncontrollably. Without his friends or his parents he wasn't his old self. The massacre at Cholula had broken him.

"Fellow Aztecs are dying and I can't do anything," he said to himself.

Citlali still followed the men on black creatures. Now he was hunting turkey to survive instead of the larger animals that he normally would. This continued until they reached the capital: Tenochtitlan. There on top of the sacred shrine was his King Montezuma II.

"The priests were right, Quetzalcoatl has returned from his exile," decreed Montezuma. Citlali looked at the so-called 'Quetzalcoatl' and he smiled, wryly. As he had feared, the massacre of Tenochtitlan happened right before his eyes. He saw blood flowing freely as his people lay dying in the streets of the capital. What had happened? The Jaguar warriors had led the attack bravely on these unstoppable shiny men and even the most elite and feared soldiers in all of Mexico, had not come close to a fair combat with these deadly horsemen. The massacre was complete. After many long and sad hours, Montezuma gave up and surrendered to Cortes and his consort, La Malinche, one of the 20 women who had joined the Spanish at Tabasco. She was, by now, bilingual in Spanish and Nahuatl.

Pedro was there in Tenochtitlan alongside Sancho at the front. The senseless killing of all those Aztec warriors had given him a queasy stomach. He had seen the charge of Jaguar Warriors with a small sense of appreciation for their bravery but the complete massacre evoked a new sensation within him: guilt. Alfonso however had thoroughly enjoyed it. After killing a lot of people, they had seized the city and settled in. A lot changed during their time in Tenochtitlan. Thousands of Aztecs caught smallpox and so many died. The virus was brought by the Spanish and as the Aztecs were not immune to it, they had perished rapidly. Pedro was there witnessing it and though they were a different creed he felt sympathy for them.

Seeing the greatest city in Mexico and the biggest city in the world fall so easily and made Citlali feel completely wrong. The disease had been around for a few months and had wiped out almost half of the population, the pale men with their black ‘horses’ called it ‘*Smallpox*’. Seeing all of the other towns and tribes banded together with the foreigners at the doors of Tenochtitlan made Citlali give up all hope, but the ‘Triple Alliance’ was all that was left. One fine Mexican morning, Citlali saw the shiny men leave Tenochtitlan, with a small force left behind, and went around attacking other smaller towns. He followed the army to somewhere he could not remember, but he knew that today was a festival. He already knew what would happen. BANG! BANG! BANG! POW! AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH! The sound of the shots and the shrieks and screams of the people were too painful for Citlali to bear. There were hundreds of elite warriors and they had all disappeared before the men with thunder sticks, which they called guns.

Pedro was riding before Hernan Cortes himself. They simply could not resist massacring so many innocent Aztecs in the name of the Empire. “For Glory!” he shouted. They all charged toward the mud huts. Alfonso, Diego, Rodrigo and Juan howled in excitement. Back in Tenochtitlan, La Malinche, the consort of Cortes, had misled Montezuma into giving Cortes his entire empire. When Cortes returned he went straight to the building where Montezuma II was being held. Pedro and Sancho saw through a window his final moments on this Earth even though it was prohibited to go near the room where Cortes was.

One day as Citlali was quenching his thirst, he observed his reflection in the lake and realised that it began to change into the deepest crimson. Something caught the corner of his eye, a large shape had floated by. Shocked, he looked closely and saw the corpse of great King Montezuma II. He was bewildered at the shocking sight and dreaded the reality of this vicious incident. Citlali had a nervous breakdown. Emotions zoomed into his head, too many to handle. But one always stayed in his mind, cold rage; he needed to have the blood of every Spanish man on his hands.

Earlier he had stalked his prey; the golden, spotted fur was difficult to miss. The jaguar was there in front of him in the clearing with its long, powerful, white

canines. The arrow had struck its head but it was not enough as it ran towards him and pounced to strike him...

Citlali had notched another arrow and let go just in time. It fell dead.

“Phew, the second arrow finally killed it.” He had only wanted the meat, but the body of Montezuma made him think of something else. He skinned the jaguar carefully and wore the skin like a warrior. That night he slipped into the city and as the Spaniards slept in Tenochtitlan a silent group of jaguar warriors was advancing menacingly. He had merged with this group and before anyone suspected anything they had slaughtered at least a 1,000 Spaniards. Citlali had finally tasted revenge. Some guns were fired and the might of that weapon was incredible, a bang and the warrior lay dead. Citlali had seen a big man fire his gun and kill a jaguar warrior to the left of him. But he was so full of rage that without a care he charged at this well-built and strong man. He had swung the gun like a club at Citlali narrowly missing his head. Citlali had gone into a crouch and now he pushed with his powerful legs and drove his knife into the middle of his chest. The warriors came in wave after wave of attack until the Aztecs finally won. As dawn broke Citlali finally felt himself relieved a bit but the rage was still there. That week, the true heir to the throne, Cuitlahuac was crowned but sadly he died of ‘*Smallpox*’ 2 months later.

The remaining Spaniards were desperate to get back at Tenochtitlan. Pedro and Sancho had charged off with the others towards small towns and villages to plunder and ransack. Pedro had seen Alfonso die a horrible death at the hands of a small agile warrior. He had felt a strange sense of happiness at this although Alfonso was one of their own. It was justice, he had thought to himself. Whilst small bands went looting, the main army was constructing 13 war-galleons to secure the lake surrounding Tenochtitlan. When these were completed, the Spanish started to besiege the capital. One day, late at night, 5 men and 10 horses had suddenly disappeared. As Pedro looked towards the city, he saw the Aztecs sacrificing them. Pedro’s face was deathly white and his eyes were wide open. It was startling, simply shocking! The next day, they got the word that the reinforcements had landed at Veracruz, they arrived on July 15th 1521 and the Spanish finally began to take the city again.

The Spanish entered the Plaza Mayor, the jaguar warriors stood their ground and charged into them; hundreds of the elite warriors began to drop like flies. Citlali was killing Spaniards out of anger and not duty. There he met Pedro, they were both of a similar age. Pedro looked directly at Citlali’s grimaced face covered in

a mix of blood and sweat. Then, as Citlali began to swing his club, Pedro closed his eyes and pulled the trigger. Blood splattered across into his face.

“Arrrrrrrrggggghhhhhhhh!” Citlali dropped to his knees and died.

“I actually killed someone,” Pedro shouted but without any cheer. Strangely, he felt guilty.

“I just kill...ed someone,” he said slowly and meekly. That one moment would be with him forever.

After winning over Tenochtitlan a second time, the Spanish destroyed the city and on the ruins they built

Mexico City.