

The Promised Land

by

Jeremy Fox

Jeremy Fox
54 Crofton Road
London, SE5 8NB
England, UK.
Tel: (44) (0) 207-701-3107
Jf@foxjones.net

CHARACTERS

THE MEXICAN SIDE

MOCTEZUMA	Emperor of Mexico
CUAUHTÉMOC	Young cousin of Moctezuma
ECATZIN	High Priest of Mexico
TEMOCTZIN	First General of Mexico
AHUÍZOTL	Nephew of Moctezuma
TECUICHPO	Moctezuma's daughter
CACAMATZIN	Singer
IXLILXOCHITL	Narrator
MEXICAN CITIZENS AND WARRIORS	

THE SPANISH SIDE

HERNÁN CORTÉS	Leading Conquistador
PEDRO DE ALVARADO	Conquistador
CRISTÓBAL DE OLID	Conquistador
GONZALO DE SANDOVAL	Conquistador
FATHER BARTOLOMÉ DE OLMEDO	Conquistador - Priest
XICOTENCATL	King of the Tlaxcalans
SPANISH AND TLAZCALAN SOLDIERS	

Notes:

At the time of the Prologue, Cacamatzin and Ixlilxochitl, survivors of the Conquest, are in their seventies. Tecuichpo - also a survivor - is about sixty and is referred to in the Prologue as OLD TECUICHPO. The main action takes place in the years 1520 - 1521, the Prologue about forty years afterwards. The songs are based on pre- and post-Conquest Aztec (Náhuatl) poetry.

The Aztecs refer to themselves as Mexica(s).- the 'x' pronounced as 'ch' in 'Loch'.

General pronunciation guideline: 'Ixlilxochitl' as 'Ishlilsochitl', 'Xicotencatl' as 'Zicotencatl', 'Tecuichpo' as 'Tecuishpa'. Names ending in '...zin' are stressed on that syllable.

PROLOGUE

Twilight. Open space bordered by fugitive shapes that might be rocks or ruins. Mexicans gather round a rustic fire. Cacamatzin sings.

CACAMATZIN

A ring of life surrounds our hearth
Songs over the earth resound
Flowers interwine with flowers
Messengers of sunlit birth
'til suddenly a mist enshrouds
A rain of flaming arrows falls
The world we sang of is no more
Our fate is written in the clouds.

A moment of silence.

OLD TECUICHPO

Ah well.

CACAMATZIN

What about a drink? Maybe it'll
finish me off.

FIRST MEXICAN

Cortés couldn't finish you.

OLD TECUICHPO

Shhh. Not so loud.

FIRST MEXICAN

Laughter's not a crime.

OLD TECUICHPO

Everything's a crime nowadays.
They'll cut you down as soon as
look at you.

FIRST MEXICAN

It's our country.

SECOND MEXICAN

Was our country.

THIRD MEXICAN

A long time ago already.

FIRST MEXICAN

What will they do? Arrest us? For
having a barbecue?

CACAMATZIN

For worshipping devils.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

FIRST MEXICAN
Or plotting against the crown.

FOURTH MEXICAN
Or sacrificing prisoners.

SECOND MEXICAN
And eating the best bits.

THIRD MEXICAN
Is it true we used to do that?

OLD TECUICHPO
I never did. Mind you I was still a girl.

CACAMATZIN
Everyone sacrifices their enemies
in one way or another.

SECOND MEXICAN
We're Christians now anyway.

FIRST MEXICAN
They say we eat pork because it
tastes like human flesh.

FOURTH MEXICAN
Who says?

SECOND MEXICAN
Somebody's been eating something
they shouldn't?

IXTLILXOCHITL
Compañeros...compañeros... a little
decorum...please...thank you
(addressing the audience
as well as his on-stage
companions)
It is good to laugh at the old ways
since they didn't do us much good.
We know the past is over. Even so
today is the feast of
Huitzilopochli, god of the sun. We
old-timers are the last who knew
him in his prime. We thought of him
as our shield, our protector, our
father. Until the Spaniards came.
Then he fled and took our world
with him.

THIRD MEXICAN
He let us down.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

IXTLILXOCHITL

There was nothing to keep him here.
Our idols had been smashed. Our
houses ruined. Our poets silenced.
Where were our leaders? Our
warriors? Our priests? Our loved
ones? The earth had swallowed them.
We became slaves in a place we once
ruled. And slaves we'll always be
if we forget how we came to this
pass. That's why we commemorate
this day in word and song. Let's
watch, listen and remember.

CACAMATZIN

'til suddenly a mist enshrouds
A rain of flaming arrows falls
The world we sang of is no more
Our fate is written in the clouds.

IXTLILXOCHITL

Listen and we'll hear the voices of
our fathers in the breathing of the
wind.

ACT 1

SCENE 1

Suspended at the back of the stage, a large golden disk, the 'Aztec' sun calendar. Stage left and right - images or sculptures of Aztec gods: Quetzalcoatl (the plumed serpent), Tlaloc (the rain god), and Tezcatlipoca (god of youth and power). Dawn breaks. Moctezuma - stands motionless before the calendar. He wears a richly-embroidered robe, knotted at the shoulder and a feathered headdress.

IXTLILXOCHITL

(continuing)

A jewel floating on a sunlit lake.
Temples, palaces, streets lined
with houses like rows of golden
corn. The great bustling, market of
Tlatelolco. Causeways that fetch
like arrows across the water to
Iztapalapa, Tacuba, Mexicalzingo,
Azcapotzalco on the shore. And in
the centre Moctezuma, emperor of
the Mexica, a god among his people.

The stage erupts with drumbeats. Figures appear - the Mexicas - led by Ecatzin, high priest and counsellor.

MEXICAS

God has heard
Who wears the golden plumes
Who brings the day
And banishes the night
God has consumed
The precious mead of life
Our sacrifice
And so returns the light
And so returns
And so returns the light.

Ecatzin brings the Mexicas to a halt. They bow before Moctezuma. The drums fall silent.

MOCTEZUMA

Ecatzin may speak.

ECATZIN

Lord we greet the dawn. The sun,
your father, smiles on us.

MOCTEZUMA

All is well?

CONTINUED:

ECATZIN

The gods will it so.

MOCTEZUMA

So long as we nourish the sun, the
sun will nourish the Mexica.

ECATZIN

It is so. Yet we are troubled.

MOCTEZUMA

You said all was well.

ECATZIN

I did, lord. But...

MOCTEZUMA

On this morning of peace and
flowers, does our high priest
disturb his lord with trifles?

ECATZIN

(Prostrating himself with
the effort required of
old age)The gods forbid! Pardon me if my
words offend.

MOCTEZUMA

What's all this about?

ECATZIN

Strange news has reached us.

MOCTEZUMA

Go on.

ECATZIN

An omen, perhaps, my lord.

MOCTEZUMA

An omen, perhaps?

ECATZIN

Yes lord. Or rather, possibly, I
should say the gods must be
consulted. Before we can be sure.
That is.

MOCTEZUMA

Sure of what?

ECATZIN

Whether the reports are true.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MOCTEZUMA

Am I to lose patience? Get up.

ECATZIN

(struggling to his feet.)
Reports, lord...

MOCTEZUMA

Reports.

ECATZIN

Reports have come to us of
strangers on the coast.

MOCTEZUMA

Well? Who are they?

ECATZIN

We can't be sure. General Temoctzin
has just returned from there with
your nephew Ahuízotl who was local
commander. They await your
pleasure.

MOCTEZUMA

I will hear them.
(To the Mexicas)
Away!

The Mexicas vanish, leaving in their place Temoctzin and
Ahuízotl.

MOCTEZUMA (CONT'D)

You've seen these strangers?

TEMOCTZIN

Lord, we have.

MOCTEZUMA

And so?

TEMOCTZIN

They're like us. And yet not like
us. Their skin is white and hair
grows from their chins. Some wear
headdresses and clothes of metal.

MOCTEZUMA

Where are they from?

TEMOCTZIN

Perhaps from heaven. I have seen
them only from a distance. Ahuízotl
has met them.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

AHUÍZOTL

My lord with your permission. They came from the sea in towers that travel through the waves.

ECATZIN

Impossible.

AHUÍZOTL

I saw it with my own eyes. On land, their leaders ride beasts, like deer. They carry swords of metal; and pipes which make a terrible noise and kill from afar.

MOCTEZUMA

Did you talk to them?

AHUÍZOTL

They took me among them and gave me their food which is sweet as we imagine must be the food of gods. Some local Potonchans teach them our language. They asked for gold. Seven days they kept me, and always they asked for gold.

MOCTEZUMA

Gold?

AHUÍZOTL

Gold my lord. And they inquired much about you also.

MOCTEZUMA

You spoke of me?

AHUÍZOTL

Of your greatness. They wish to see you.

MOCTEZUMA

What can they want with me? What will they do if they arrive here? Could it be a god that comes? Ecatzin?

ECATZIN

(Reluctantly)

My lord, I think...

MOCTEZUMA

(To Ahuízotl)

You say they asked for gold?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

AHUÍZOTL

Yes lord.

MOCTEZUMA

Perhaps we should try to please them.

(to Ecatzin)

What do you say?

ECATZIN

My lord...

MOCTEZUMA

We'll send presents from our treasury, and food in case they're hungry. They'll see that we are powerful, that we lack nothing, and that we're generous. Temoctzin, you will return to the strangers with our gifts. Ahuízotl also. And while you're away, we'll consult the gods. Ecatzin.

ECATZIN

Your servant listens.

MOCTEZUMA

If this were a god, who would it be?

ECATZIN

Well lord, that's a question indeed.

MOCTEZUMA

Could it be Quetzalcoatl?

ECATZIN

Well now...

MOCTEZUMA

Legend says that he'll come one day to reclaim his kingdom.

ECATZIN

My lord is right about that.

MOCTEZUMA

Or could we have offended Huizilopochtli, or Tezcatlipoca?

ECATZIN

As you say, my lord.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

MOCTEZUMA

You'll seek guidance from the heavens. If we've done wrong, we must atone. See to it. Wait. If it's a god he might ask to eat someone. As senior officer, that would have to be you Temoctzin. You'd better offer yourself just in case. Don't worry about your wife and children. We'll make sure they're looked after. Not that we want to lose you. But you never know with gods.

TEMOCTZIN

We are in their hands, lord.

MOCTEZUMA

Let's trust to that.

Ecatzin, Temoctzin and Ahuízotl leave.

MOCTEZUMA (CONT'D)

(continuing)

No need to panic. The gods will support us. We'll implore them for help. We're the strongest race on the earth.

CACAMATZIN

(Singing)

The gods are capricious
They like to be coaxed
In the palm of their hand
They roll us and dice us
Even the wisest are sometimes
hoaxed.

SCENE 2

THE SPANIARDS AT TLAXCALA.

IXTLILXOCHITL

The strangers pushed inland quickly. They were already camped with our enemies at Tlaxcala when Temoctzin and Ahuízotl came upon them. Xicotencatl, the Tlaxcalan king, had made them welcome.

Temoctzin's delegation delivers Moctezuma's gifts to Cortés and his officers.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CORTÉS

What's this?

TEMOCTZIN

Lord Moctezuma sends gifts and food to sustain you. Anything else you require we are commanded to give.

CORTÉS

Tell Moctezuma we're pleased to hear from him.

ALVARADO

It's all splashed in stains.

OLMEDO

What does this mean?

TEMOCTZIN

Everything has been blessed as custom demands.

ALVARADO

Looks like blood.

TEMOCTZIN

Of the most noble prisoners.

OLMEDO

What did he say?

SANDOVAL

The blood of prisoners?

ALVARADO

Sacrifice.

CORTÉS

Good god!

ALVARADO

We can't eat this.

OLMEDO

Heaven protect us from the evil we see before us.

CORTÉS

Aren't we charged by the Pope to bring enlightenment to savages of the new world? Well here's work for a crusade.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

OLMEDO

That may be. But we can't allow
this filth among soldiers of
Christ.

TEMOCTZIN

(To Ahuízotl)
They reject our gifts.

AHUÍZOTL

They don't like blood. Though when
I stayed with them, they drank the
blood of their own god, and ate his
flesh.

TEMOCTZIN

Gods aren't always what they seem.
(To Cortés)
We don't understand.

CORTÉS

(To Olmedo)
You tell them.

OLMEDO

God forbids sacrifice.

TEMOCTZIN

On what then do your gods feed?

OLMEDO

There's only one god. And he needs
nothing of men except their
worship.

AHUÍZOTL

A god still has to eat,
otherwise...

TEMOCTZIN

(To Ahuízotl)
Don't argue, you'll only offend
them.

CORTÉS

What else have you brought? What
about gold? We heard that Moctezuma
has a stores of it.

TEMOCTZIN

We've brought jewels, jade and
turquoise, and precious feathers.

Alvarado and Olid push Ahuízotl out of the way and begin
plundering the baskets.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Feathers, jade and beads they toss away, but amongst the items they find gold effigies. Cortés watches.

ALVARADO

There is gold!

The Spaniards pass the gold objects from hand to hand.

OLID

Amid a lot of trash.

CORTÉS

How much?

ALVARADO

A few pounds perhaps.

SANDOVAL

Fine work.

OLMEDO

The deceitful skill of the heathen.

OLID

There'll be more where this came from.

ALVARADO

There'd better be.

CORTÉS

(To Temoctzin)

Is that all?

TEMOCTZIN

These are the gifts of our lord Moctezuma.

CORTÉS

We're not impressed.

TEMOCTZIN

Everything is of the finest quality. The best we can do.

CORTÉS

Baubles. Trinkets. Is Moctezuma trying to insult us? We hear the streets are lined with gold in Mexico.

TEMOCTZIN

With respect, lord, it isn't so. Gold is scarce and comes from afar.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

CORTÉS

We find that hard to believe.

(Indicating Ahuízotl)

What does that other fella say?

AHUÍZOTL

What General Temoctzin says, I must
also say.

CORTÉS

(Indicating bearers)

And these? Never mind. They won't
know anything. Where's Xicotencatl?

XICOTENCATL

At your service.

CORTÉS

(To Temoctzin)

You know who this is?

TEMOCTZIN

Xicotencatl. So-called king of the
Tlaxcalans.

CORTÉS

A king who's seen the light.

OLMEDO

And found the one true god.

CORTÉS

He says the Mexica are rich.

XICOTENCATL

It's true. By the Catholic god, I
swear it.

TEMOCTZIN

The Tlaxcalans will say anything to
save themselves. We use them as
slaves.

CORTÉS

They're now our allies.

TEMOCTZIN

Then they'll become your slaves
too.

XICOTENCATL

Tell Moctezuma, there'll be no more
slaves.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

TEMOCTZIN

I'll tell him your heart is ripe
for plucking.

CORTÉS

You came with gifts and now you
issue threats? Arrest them.

Soldiers surround Temoctzin and Ahuízotl.

CORTÉS (CONT'D)

(continuing)

A round if you please.

One of the soldiers fires a musket into the air startling the
Mexicas.

CORTÉS (CONT'D)

(continuing)

Tell Moctezuma that whoever
threatens us will be destroyed.
Tell him we have great weapons;
that we're soldiers of the King of
Spain.

OLMEDO

And followers of Christ.

CORTÉS

And say that we're coming to see
him.

TEMOCTZIN

What if the emperor doesn't wish to
see you?

CORTÉS

What has he to fear? Our aims are
peaceful. And we come with
knowledge of eternal life. Tell him
that.

TEMOCTZIN

How can we take messages if we are
your prisoners?

CORTÉS

Release them.

OLMEDO

In nomine patris et Filii et
Spiritus Sancti exstinguatur omnis
virtus diabolis.

SPANIARDS

Amen.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (6)

TEMOCTZIN

What does this mean?

CORTÉS

He talks to god. In god's language.

OLMEDO

Through his holy anointing and his most tender mercy may the Lord forgive your sins. Amen.

SPANIARDS

Amen.

CORTÉS

And so farewell. Go.

The Mexica leave.

CORTÉS (CONT'D)

We'll speak more of this gentlemen.

Olid, Olmedo and Xicotencatl leave. Alvarado lingers.

ALVARADO

General a word if I may? The trinkets they brought don't amount to much.

CORTÉS

They're cautious. Testing us. But those little pieces of gold were of the finest quality. There'll be plenty more. Make no mistake, we've found Eldorado.

ALVARADO

How do we know that?

CORTÉS

The Tlaxcalans think so.

ALVARADO

Maybe they're liars as the Mexica claim?

CORTÉS

No.

ALVARADO

You can't be sure.

CORTÉS

Patience, Alvarado. The rewards will come.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (7)

CORTÉS (CONT'D)

We have this country in our grasp.
Today they bring trinkets, tomorrow
jewels.

ALVARADO

And if they don't?

CORTÉS

We'll squeeze them a little more
every day, until... but once
they've seen our power I don't
think force will necessary.

ALVARADO

You're relying on diplomacy?

CORTÉS

That's right.

ALVARADO

It won't work.

CORTÉS

I think it will.

ALVARADO

You believe these people will give
their gold away. It's as precious
to them as to us.

CORTÉS

Do you have you an alternative?

ALVARADO

We should march on Mexico now. Take
them by surprise.

CORTÉS

According to reports, there are
hundreds of thousands of them. And
my guess is they know every move we
make. We'll do it my way.

ALVARADO

You wouldn't have you've lost your
stomach for battle?

CORTÉS

That's not a very intelligent
question, Alvarado. The kind I'd
expect rather of a...

ALVARADO

Yes General?

CORTÉS

Of a fool.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (8)

ALVARADO

Nobody calls me that. Not even you.

Both reach for their swords.

CORTÉS

In the king's name! Draw Alvarado.
I'm ready.

A moment of stand-off. Then Alvarado backs down.

CORTÉS (CONT'D)

The better for you that your sword
knew its place.
You're my first lieutenant. Let's
keep it that way. Remember, I alone
act on the king's authority.

ALVARADO

So long as you don't forget that
the men are here to make their
fortune. That's what you promised
them.

SCENE 3

Moctezuma's palace, Mexico City.

TEMOCTZIN

I tried to dissuade them from
coming, but they wouldn't listen.
Perhaps only the gods can stand in
their way.

MOCTEZUMA

Are they gods?

TEMOCTZIN

They didn't seem so.

MOCTEZUMA

Did you ask? Gods don't always show
themselves.

TEMOCTZIN

Their leader said they were men.
Though they're not men as we know
them.

MOCTEZUMA

What's their leader's name?

TEMOCTZIN

Cortés.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MOCTEZUMA

We know no god of that name. What does he want with us?

TEMOCTZIN

To see you.

MOCTEZUMA

And if we refuse?

TEMOCTZIN

He says he will see you.

MOCTEZUMA

No mortal can command Moctezuma.

ECATZIN

Lord if I may? Quetzalcoatl has a beard and his skin is white. He comes disguised...

MOCTEZUMA

Yes, yes, Ecatzin, we know that.

CUAUHTÉMOC

If they are gods, why would they delay coming here? Why do they make allies of our enemies the Tlaxcalans, a race of savages?

TEMOCTZIN

They seek strength in numbers.

CUAUHTÉMOC

Then they are men.

ECATZIN

Cauhtémoc is young. When he's been alive a little longer, he'll know that what seems obvious is, well, how shall I put it, not obvious at all. We can't expect to know the mind of a god.

MOCTEZUMA

Thank you Ecatzin. Enough now.

ECATZIN

I'm my lord's servant.

TEMOCTZIN

They claim to be subjects of a great king who dwells across the ocean.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

ECATZIN

How can that be, if the ocean is an
endless waste?

MOCTEZUMA

Ecatzin!

ECATZIN

I'm silent, my lord.

MOCTEZUMA

If they're men, we must treat them
with courtesy, as ambassadors. But
what do they want?

TEMOCTZIN

Gold is their first delight. All
your other gifts they treated with
contempt. But the gold sent them
into a kind of ecstasy. They
laughed and showed it to each
other, could scarcely tear their
eyes from it. They seem to hunger
for it as a beast hungers for food.

ECATZIN

Do they eat it?

TEMOCTZIN

I can't say.

Shouts from offstage - an argument. Ahuízotl enters
breathless. He prostrates himself before Moctezuma.

AHUÍZOTL

Lord.

ECATZIN

Moctezuma is in council.

MOCTEZUMA

Death comes to those who venture
unannounced into our presence. Even
for you Ahuízotl.

AHUÍZOTL

Then let death be my fate. But
still I must warn my lord that the
strangers have reached Cholula.

MOCTEZUMA

Already?

TEMOCTZIN

The Cholulans are our friends.
They'll defend us.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

AHUÍZOTL

They're finished. In a day Cholula fell, and the Tlaxcalans have burned it. They killed even the noblest warriors on the battlefield. Women and children also.

ECATZIN

That's an outrage.

CUAUHTÉMOC

They're clearly a bunch of criminals. We should get rid of them before they do any more damage.

MOCTEZUMA

Only men could commit such an ugly crime.

ECATZIN

Or a violent god.

AHUÍZOTL

Now they march on us.

MOCTEZUMA

Thank you for your pains, Ahuízotl. Go to rest.

Exit Ahuízotl.

MOCTEZUMA

They seek the emperor. Should we hide?

CUAUHTÉMOC

Can Moctezuma lead if he is hidden?

MOCTEZUMA

(Suddenly furious)

You dare to teach us? Take your eyes elsewhere or we will have them put out.

CUAUHTÉMOC

If as your cousin I can't advise ...

MOCTEZUMA

Don't provoke me, Cuauhtémoc. Have we upset the gods, Ecatzin?

ECATZIN

Perhaps, my lord.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

MOCTEZUMA

Surely the strangers come in peace.

CUAUHTÉMOC

After what happened to the Cholulans?

MOCTEZUMA

Maybe the Cholulans provoked them. You can't get away with provoking gods. We must act more wisely. We'll welcome them as guests.

CUAUHTÉMOC

Is it wise to take into your house someone who may put you out of it?

TEMOCTZIN

The question is good, my lord.

MOCTEZUMA

We have decided. Let the people know that a ...visitor is coming. Yes. A great visitor. And we must prepare his welcome.

CUAUHTÉMOC

Lord, I urge..

MOCTEZUMA

Don't urge, cousin. The meeting is over.

All leave except Moctezuma and Temoctzin whom Moctezuma signals to remain.

MOCTEZUMA

If we have to fight, can we defeat them?

TEMOCTZIN

They are few in number. And we've nothing to fear from the Tlaxcalans.

MOCTEZUMA

You've good spirit Temoctzin. Still I wonder how many will die at the hands of these newcomers?

TEMOCTZIN

My lord...

MOCTEZUMA

I've a strange foreboding that I'm to be the last emperor.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

TEMOCTZIN

Lord...

MOCTEZUMA

Are you still here, Temoctzin?
You're tired. Go to rest.

Temoctzin leaves.

MOCTEZUMA (CONT'D)

Civilization's a fragile thing.
Hard to build, snuffed out in a
day. In the long run everything
comes to an end. The question is -
how soon.

The light fades. Moctezuma sits motionless.

SCENE 4

Daylight. Moctezuma's palace.

CACAMATZIN

Is this the truth?
Or just a dream?
A waking from a sleep
Tochihuitzin the poet said so
Coyolchiuhqui sang it in the
streets
In life we sleep
In death we dream
Like the springtime grasses
Flowers of the sun
We come and go
Flower and bloom
Seed and weep
Tochihuitzin the poet said so
Coyolchiuhqui sang it in the
streets
Is this the truth
Or just a dream?
Briefly are we on this earth
Tochihuitzin the poet said so
Coyolchiuhqui sang it in the
streets
Jade will break
Gold will melt
Plumes of Quetzal burn
Only for a moment
Are we here to meet
Find pleasure where we can
And then pass on
Tochihuitzin the poet said so
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CACAMATZIN (CONT'D)

Coyolchihui sang it in the streets.

IXTLILXOCHITL

For days Moctezuma withdrew into himself, doing and saying nothing while life went on round him. Servants put food before him, but he wouldn't touch it. Councillors he dismissed with a wave of the hand. Even his favourite concubine couldn't get a rise out of him if you see what I mean. And all the time the Spaniards were marching towards us, swelling their ranks with our enemies, and slaughtering whoever stood in their way. Like a giant snake they advance over the hills and through the mountain passes, stirring up the dust, weapons and armour glistening in the sun. And then suddenly they reach the lake shore. Still Moctezuma vacillates, lost in space and time. The councillors beg Cuauhtémoc to intervene. That's a risky business. You can't tell an emperor what to do. But after seeing his young cousin, Moctezuma's spirit revives a little. He has himself dressed, and together with the councillors goes to meet the strangers.

SCENE 5

The gates of Mexico. Servants carry Moctezuma in a litter. With him are Ecatzin, Cuauhtémoc, Temoctzin, Tecuichpo, and servants.

MOCTEZUMA

Go slowly. The strangers must wait to see our person.

(Pause)

Do we have enough gold?

ECATZIN

Our lord ordered three baskets.

MOCTEZUMA

We did? But is it enough to satisfy them?

(Pause)

Tecuichpo?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TECUICHPO

Father.

MOCTEZUMA

You will please the new god.
Whatever he should demand of you.

TECUICHPO

I'll do my best.

MOCTEZUMA

Should all our councillors attend?
We're unarmed. If we should all
fall...Cuauhtémoc you will go back.

CUAUHTÉMOC

There's no fear here.

MOCTEZUMA

Bravery is honourable. But you are
impetuous. Go.

CUAUHTÉMOC

(To Temoctzin)

The emperor's lost his wits.

TEMOCTZIN

You'll be sent to the gods if
you're not careful. Now get out of
here.

CUAUHTÉMOC

Unwillingly I go from your
presence.

He leaves.

MOCTEZUMA

Should we have brought soldiers?
But what would a god think if we
met him in the uniform of war? If
we're to die, let it be for our
country.

Suddenly Mexicans and Spaniards are face to face. The latter are heavily armed. Cortés leads. Moctezuma stands. He and Cortés gaze at each other, across an invisible divide. Moctezuma winces at Cortés' stare, half looks away, then remembers himself and holds his gaze.

CORTÉS

Moctezuma?

MOCTEZUMA

We are.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Cortés approaches. Moctezuma's guards try to protect the emperor but he waves them away.

MOCTEZUMA

Lord, you have travelled far and are weary. Be cheerful, for you have reached Mexico, your home. We have waited long for the joyful day of your arrival. You have travelled to us through the mists and clouds, and are come to be among your people.

CORTÉS

(To Xicotencatl; sotto voce)

Does he treat me as a man or a god?

XICOTENCATL

Something like a god, something like a man.

CORTÉS

Let's see.

(aloud)

Have no fear, Moctezuma for we love you. We too have waited many days to see your face. Now we are content. This day will be remembered in the history of the world.

Cortés embraces Moctezuma, who responds awkwardly. They exchange necklaces. At a signal from Cortés, the Spaniards bow.

MOCTEZUMA

My councillors and warriors are here to welcome you.

Moctezuma's attendants touch the floor with their hand and then put it to their lips. Cortés notices Tecuichpo.

MOCTEZUMA

Our daughter, Tecuichpo.

CORTÉS

Enchanted.

MOCTEZUMA

She has come to serve you.

CORTÉS

You're own daughter? It's kind of you but...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

XICOTENCATL

(to Cortés)

To refuse the gift would be an insult.

CORTÉS

Ah!

(To Moctezuma)

You do me great honour, sir. Your daughter will be a princess among us.

MOCTEZUMA

Come. Rest and take refreshment.

Moctezuma takes Cortés by the hand and leads him off.

ALVARADO

(To the Spaniards)

All right. Let's go. Keep your eyes sharp and your swords at the ready.

All go off except Temoctzin. Cuauhtémoc re-emerges.

CUAUHTÉMOC

Well? Are they gods or men?

TEMOCTZIN

Men.

CUAUHTÉMOC

How do you know?

TEMOCTZIN

They marched here under the sun.

CUAUHTÉMOC

So?

TEMOCTZIN

They smell of sweat.

SCENE 6

Before the great temple.

IXTLILXOCHITL

Moctezuma assigned them the largest of all the palaces, that of his grandfather, Axayácatl. It had two hundred and thirteen rooms and a courtyard five hundred paces across. We fed them and gave every soldier a woman to serve his needs.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

IXTLILXOCHITL (CONT'D)

That way, Moctezuma said, they'd be content. But we didn't get along.

Enter Olmedo and Ecatzin disputing.

OLMEDO

Your idols are an offence to god.

(He knocks over a statue)

This hellish place must be cleansed. How can your people be saved when they're steeped in depravity?

ECATZIN

That's Tlaloc, the rain god. His anger will bring drought. Or if not drought then flood. Why do you insult our holy places.

OLMEDO

There's nothing holy here. As Christ destroyed the graven images, so must we.

Enter Cortés

OLMEDO

Ah General. I was just telling the high priest here that we can't have all these false idols around.

CORTÉS

No.

OLMEDO

They must all be destroyed.

CORTÉS

Of course, father. Still, as newcomers, we should try to be tolerant.

OLMEDO

Christ didn't tolerate the desecration of his temple.

CORTÉS

Isn't our prime task to convert the heathen to the ways of Christ?

OLMEDO

It is.

CORTÉS

Once we've achieved that, they'll smash the idols themselves, won't they?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

OLMEDO

You could argue so.

CORTÉS

Let's pray then for their enlightenment.

ECATZIN

What does this mean?

OLMEDO

You must give up the old gods, for they are weak and useless.

ECATZIN

If my lord Moctezuma could hear you, he'd have you imprisoned. The gods are sacred defenders of this place and of our people. No one, not even a guest, may insult them. I'll hear no more.

Ecatzin leaves.

CORTÉS

Go after him, Olmedo. We don't want a fight over religion.

OLMEDO

The Amorites fled and were killed. The Gibeonites thirsted for truth, and were saved.

CORTÉS

Even the thirsty will drown in a flood. Let the truth flow gently so they have time to take it in.

Olmedo hurries off. Cortés signals to Tecuichpo who has been waiting in the background.

CORTÉS

Come Tecuichpo. What do you think of all this?

Tecuichpo signs that she now belongs to Cortés

CORTÉS

You don't have to follow me around, you know.

TECUICHPO

I am my lord's.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

CORTÉS

Here, when we're alone, you can
call me Hernán. Say it. Hernán.

TECUICHPO

Her...an.

CORTÉS

N..A..N. Nan. Hernán.

TECUICHPO

Nan. Hernán

CORTÉS

Nan no. Hernán.

TECUICHPO

Hernán

CORTÉS

That's good.

TECUICHPO

Tecuichpo.

CORTÉS

Tecuichpo.

(He pronounces it badly.)

Olmedo says you're a heathen and
must be saved from the devil. Hard
to believe god could have allowed
such beauty if you weren't already
his child. No doubt he'll save you
in his own way. But if you're to
survive here on earth, you'll have
to give up your soul and everything
else, Cuishpa.

TECUICHPO

Tecuichpo.

CORTÉS

Should I have that on my
conscience? It's God's work we do
here.

Sandoval and Olid enter.

SANDOVAL

General.

Cortés tears himself away from Tecuichpo who runs off.

CORTÉS

What do you want?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

SANDOVAL

There's a plot afoot.

OLID

Moctezuma has been sending messages out from his palace. People are chanting.

CORTÉS

Chanting what?

SANDOVAL

We're not sure. It sounds like a war song. There's a lot of movement. Our men are being followed wherever they go.

CORTÉS

Where's Alvarado?

OLID

Strengthening the watch. He thinks we should attack straight away, take them by surprise.

CORTÉS

I know what he thinks.

SANDOVAL

Your orders General?

CORTÉS

My orders? We'll pay Moctezuma a visit.

(To Olid)

Tell Alvarado to meet us at the emperor's palace. And to bring the Tlaxcalan.

OLID

What about troops?

CORTÉS

Four Spanish officers and the king of Tlaxcala! What more do we need? Come on. Let's see what we can do to keep the peace.

All leave.

SCENE 7

Moctezuma's palace. Cacamatzin sings with a chorus of the Mexica.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CACAMATZIN

Huizilopochli the young warrior
Strides forward lance in hand
Calls to glory all the brave
Mexico the fatherland.

MEXICAS

Our enemies are now in sight
Mexica prepare to fight.

CACAMATZIN

Soldiers of Moctezuma's land
They'll not fear death, who fear
not life
For they will lie among the stars
Whoever dies in sacrifice.

MEXICAS

Our enemies are now in sight etc.

Moctezuma on stage. Enter Cortés, Alvarado, Olid, Sandoval
and Xicotencatl

MOCTEZUMA

Welcome. We were about to send for
you to join us. You would like to
see more of our city. We have many
temples.

CORTÉS

What about the treasury?

MOCTEZUMA

You've already seen our treasury,
Hernán. And your men have emptied
it of gold. What do you do with
this metal?

CORTÉS

It keeps us healthy.

MOCTEZUMA

We will try to obtain more. Though
we must ask you not to destroy our
statues.

CORTÉS

Destroy? Who would be doing that?

ALVARADO

A few accidents, General. The men
get excited.

CORTÉS

Anxiety is the culprit.

(To Moctezuma)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CORTÉS (CONT'D)

Of course, if you were more accommodating, these things wouldn't happen. That's why we came to see you.

MOCTEZUMA

We hear.

CORTÉS

You've been stirring your people against us.

MOCTEZUMA

What nonsense. Who says this?

CORTÉS

Xicotencatl himself is a witness.

MOCTEZUMA

That Tlaxcalan...?

CORTÉS

Our loyal and trusted friend.

MOCTEZUMA

When you know our world better, you will not think so.

CORTÉS

As I was saying, your people are mutinous.

MOCTEZUMA

Just excitable, like yours. We'll order calm if you will do the same.

CORTÉS

The problem goes deeper. We need security. Two of our men were assaulted yesterday in the market.

MOCTEZUMA

We'll punish those responsible.

CORTÉS

It's not enough. We need you to come with us.

MOCTEZUMA

Why so?

CORTÉS

To keep us safe from attack. You'll be a guest in our palace.

Alvarado, Olid and Xicotencatl approach, swords at the ready.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

MOCTEZUMA

And these weapons?

CORTÉS

For your protection.

MOCTEZUMA

We need no protection. Still less from this Tlaxcalan.

XICOTENCATL

He treats me with contempt. Let's see who wields power here.

MOCTEZUMA

Why do you bring enemies into our presence?

CORTÉS

Xicotencatl will be your enemy no longer.

XICOTENCATL

As Cortés says, so it will be.

CORTÉS

You'll be emperor in our palace as much as in yours.

ALVARADO

For god's sake let's get out of here before the people find out what we're up to.

MOCTEZUMA

Wait! My person is not such as can be made a prisoner of. My people would not suffer it.

ALVARADO

Prisoner? No one mentioned prison, did they? What do you say, Olid?

OLID

Prison? Never.

CORTÉS

If you refuse our invitation, we can't guarantee your safety.

The Spaniards are pressing now. For a few tense moments, Moctezuma is inclined to resist; then submits.

MOCTEZUMA

We have considered your invitation. Our decision is to accept.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

XICOTENCATL
Moctezuma chooses wisely.

CORTÉS
That'll do chief.

MOCTEZUMA
As well we can rule from there as
from here. But we are not a
prisoner.

CORTÉS
Certainly not.

MOCTEZUMA
If we wish to return here, we
shall.

CORTÉS
Naturally.

ALVARADO
Come on. Let's go. Let's go.

They leave.

SCENE 8

Moctezuma's room in the palace of Axayácatl.

IXTLILXOCHITL
They took him off to his new
quarters in the palace of
Axayácatl. And there he sits, day
after day. Ecatzin the high priest
comes and goes; the emperor's wives
and servants too. But mostly he
sees Spaniards. When they're not
pressing him for more treasure,
they complain that his people
aren't supplying enough food, or
enough women, or enough of whatever
else occurs to them. All in the
name of god.

MOCTEZUMA
What is it you want from us?

OLMEDO
To bring you to the truth. You must
submit to god.

MOCTEZUMA
We are like a god to our people.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

OLMEDO

You're a man, Moctezuma, like me. Cortés too is a man. Even the king of Spain is a man - though a very great one. The Pope is a man - god's vicar on earth. He commands us to bring you and your people to the church of Christ so that you'll be saved.

MOCTEZUMA

Saved from what?

OLMEDO

From evil.

MOCTEZUMA

Our own gods protect us.

OLMEDO

Yes you have your gods. Dozens of them. You cut out the hearts of men and children in their honour.

MOCTEZUMA

We sacrifice to them. In return they offer a life of ease and pleasure.

OLMEDO

What kind of god would live on blood and torment? The one true god is full of kindness. You don't have to visit him. He is everywhere and sees everything. You must submit to his church. You must learn to know god's son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

MOCTEZUMA

And if we do not?

OLMEDO

You'll spend the afterlife in hell.

MOCTEZUMA

You threaten us?

OLMEDO

The church doesn't issue threats. Damnation is the fate of all those who refuse god's light. But to those who come to him freely, he is merciful. He forgives all sins.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MOCTEZUMA

Ecatzin. What can our priest respond to theirs?

ECATZIN

Lord...gentlemen. We know you have great learning and strength. Perhaps what you say is right. For how can we, mere mortals, penetrate the thoughts of those who rule our fate? Everything in this world perishes. Our gods gave us life and when they so wish, they will take life away. You say we will be destroyed. But our gods have always treated us well. They have given us a food and water, and with their guidance we have built our city. It wouldn't do to reject them.

OLMEDO

You mislead your emperor, Ecatzin. Your world rests on lies. Satan has led you and your people astray.

ECATZIN

Satan? Is that another god?

OLMEDO

He who strives daily to bring men to deceive almighty god. He who deceives you. He who lurks in your temples among vile statues and idols caked in blood.

MOCTEZUMA

But if your god is powerful, how can this Satan do so much harm?

OLMEDO

He can harm only those who don't believe.

MOCTEZUMA

Then how come you know about him and we don't?

ECATZIN

A good question, my lord!

OLMEDO

Because Satan has you in his clutches. Belief will open your eyes. It's a simple choice between life and death.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

MOCTEZUMA

Then perhaps we must choose death.

OLMEDO

In the Lord's name I ask you to think carefully. There is still time. I will come again. Per Christum Dominum nostrum. Amen

Olmedo bows hurriedly and leaves.

MOCTEZUMA

He turns his back on us.

ECATZIN

It seems to be the way of the Christians.

MOCTEZUMA

They're going to make a lot of trouble for us, Ecatzin.

ECATZIN

They're certainly not the most pleasant guests.

MOCTEZUMA

You will inform our councillors of this meeting. Tell them...

ECATZIN

Yes lord?

MOCTEZUMA

Ask them.

ECATZIN

I listen.

MOCTEZUMA

If they could rescue me?

ECATZIN

(Shocked)

You? Lord was it you who spoke?

MOCTEZUMA

Carry our words as you hear them. We think it was a man.

SCENE 9

TECUICHPO

Was I born
 To leave my father's house?
 Did the gods
 Welcome our enemies?
 Should their delight
 Be at our people's cost?
 Weep Coatlicue
 For Mexico is lost.

CACAMATZIN

I am the singer of the songs of my
 race
 Rise up Mexica, war is glory
 Huizilopochtli walks at our side
 The enemy cowers and hides his
 face.

TECUICHPO

The stranger
 Forced entry on your child
 Innocence
 Is fled, dishonour stays
 Day turns aside
 My lord has shed his cloak
 His skin is white
 I cannot hide, I cannot hide.

CACAMATZIN

Rise up Mexica, Spaniards advance
 Tlaxcalans, Texcocans tremble in
 fear
 Tezcatlipoca walks at our side
 In our hand he has placed his
 spear.

TECUICHPO

Weep Coatlicue...

CACAMATZIN

Rise up Mexica, war is glory.

TECUICHPO

Weep Coatlicue...

CACAMATZIN

Tezcatlipoca walks at your side.

TECUICHPO

I cannot hide, I cannot hide.

SCENE 10

Cortés's quarters - palace of Axayácatl

IXTLILXOCHITL

The Spaniards too had their
difficulties too.

SANDOVAL

You sent for me General?

CORTÉS

We've known each other a long time,
Gonzalo.

SANDOVAL

Since boyhood.

CORTÉS

A problem has arisen.

SANDOVAL

Sir?

CORTÉS

The reports I've sent home seemed
to have made me some enemies. An
officer of the crown is on his way
to arrest me.

SANDOVAL

This can't be the king's doing.

CORTÉS

My old colleague Velásquez, the
Governor of Cuba, is behind it. He
thinks I've exceeded my orders by
coming to Mexico City and has
persuaded the authorities that I'm
out of control. What do you think,
Sandoval? Is he right?

SANDOVAL

The men are in good heart and they
follow you willingly.

CORTÉS

Yes, but do I have the right to
lead them?

SANDOVAL

At this distance from Spain, sir,
I'd say right is on the side of
whoever takes it. So long, of
course, as we keep the king's
favour.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CORTÉS

I'm glad to hear you say so,
Gonzalo.

SANDOVAL

What will you do?

CORTÉS

Go down to meet my pursuer.

SANDOVAL

Alone? You can't possibly.

CORTÉS

No, I'll take a detachment with me.
And a good second in command.

SANDOVAL

Alvarado?

CORTÉS

He's the obvious choice. But would
you take him?

SANDOVAL

It's not for me to say, sir.

CORTÉS

I'm asking you to say. Consider it
an order if that helps

SANDOVAL

(Hesitating)

Well.

CORTÉS

Go on.

SANDOVAL

Well sir, in my view, Alvarado's
interests may not coincide with
yours.

CORTÉS

He might not take my side?

SANDOVAL

No.

CORTÉS

Then you'll come in his place,
Gonzalo. We leave for the coast at
dawn tomorrow.

SANDOVAL

Thank you General.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CORTÉS

It will mean leaving Alvarado in charge here. He thinks I'm too soft with the Mexicans. Says we should hang Moctezuma, kill his officials, and take over the city.

SANDOVAL

To attack these people would be a monstrous act sir, and an unchristian one. Leaving aside that we're seriously outnumbered.

CORTÉS

You might remind him of that before we leave.

SANDOVAL

I'll do my best General.

SCENE 11

A street in Mexico City.

IXTLILXOCHITL

Cortés's absence looked like a good opportunity to rearrange matters.

CUAUHTÉMOC

When he leaves, we'll throw the rest of them out.

TEMOCTZIN

Not so fast. Their swords can kill a thousand men without breaking. And then they have those pipes that spurt fire and metal.

CUAUHTÉMOC

If our information is correct, there'll only a hundred or so left after Cortés leaves.

AHUÍZOTL

What of my uncle? He's still a prisoner.

CUAUHTÉMOC

Moctezuma's a traitor.

AHUÍZOTL

How can you say that?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CUAUHTÉMOC
He let the strangers in.

AHUÍZOTL
He welcomed them as guests.

CUAUHTÉMOC
Then he was a fool.

AHUÍZOTL
He's still our emperor.

CUAUHTÉMOC
Is he? Then why doesn't he stop
them smashing our statues and
stealing our treasure? Why doesn't
he walk free?

AHUÍZOTL
He is free. He's just dealing with
them, that's all.

TEMOCTZIN
We shouldn't be arguing. It's just
what our enemies would want.

CUAUHTÉMOC
I'll tell you what our enemies
want. That we do nothing. That we
sit with our arms folded while they
kick us out of our home.

TEMOCTZIN
They haven't tried to do that.

CUAUHTÉMOC
It's next on their list.

They walk off arguing.

SCENE 12

The Spanish quarters, palace of Axayácatl.

CORTÉS
Above all you're to keep the peace.
Discipline among our own men is as
important as keeping the Mexicans
content. Is that understood?

ALVARADO
It is.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

OLID

We won't fail you, General.

CORTÉS

The feast of Tozcatl is due shortly.

OLMEDO

These heathen ceremonies undermine the church's mission.

CORTÉS

Yet on this occasion the church will hold its tongue.

ALVARADO

What about the danger to us? There'll be thousands gathered outside to celebrate this feast. They could use the occasion to attack us.

CORTÉS

Moctezuma has assured me there'll be no trouble.

ALVARADO

The assurances of an Indian.

CORTÉS

While he's in captivity he'll keep his people quiet.

OLID

But can we trust him?

CORTÉS

Xicotencatl?

ALVARADO

What could an Indian know of this?

CORTÉS

The king perceives what we can only guess. Well chief?

XICOTENCATL

The Mexica still obey Moctezuma.

CORTÉS

Are they restless?

XICOTENCATL

They fear your anger Don Hernán.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CORTÉS

What about the feast? Will there be trouble?

XICOTENCATL

For the Mexica it's the feast of life. There'll be drinking and dancing.

OLMEDO

And sacrifice?

XICOTENCATL

The finest young man of the nation gives up his soul. Thus is life on earth. Whoever seeks riches, whoever desires abundance will reap only misery. For we are born with nothing and with nothing we must die. So say the Mexica at the feast of Tozcatl.

OLID

Do you believe this?

XICOTENCATL

We have disarded the old beliefs since you came among us.

OLMEDO

The Mexicans must do likewise.

CORTÉS

(To Xicotencatl)

Thanks chief. In my absence I ask you please to keep watch and report what you learn to Captain Alvarado.

(to the others)

The decision is taken, gentlemen. You'll permit the feast of Tozcatl. And you'll keep the peace. Such are my orders. Xicotencatl will be your eyes and ears. Look to him. He moves where we cannot. We will return within sixty days.

(to Xicotencatl)

Chief if you would be so kind, we need a couple of your men to help guide us back to the coast. I want to take a different route in case of ambush. Farewell gentlemen.

OLMEDO

God speed General.

Cortés leaves with Xoctencatl.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

ALVARADO

(Mimicking)

'He's our eyes and ears. Look to him.' What kind of General would ask us to look to a savage for our safety?

OLMEDO

Captain, General Cortés is our leader and I must insist...

ALVARADO

Do I offend your ears, father? Then I'll moderate my tongue. But not my plans. We're a handful of men in the midst of half a million savages. Doubtless God will save our souls if we die here. But my job is to make sure we live. We'll set our own men among the Mexicans. Their eyes will tell us more than an Indian's words.

All leave.

SCENE 13

Mexico City. The Mexica are busy decorating the great plaza, setting up idols and statues, food and drink stalls, bouquets of flowers, rehearsing music and dance. Xicotencatl and Olid watch surreptitiously.

MEXICAS

(Raggedly)

As king among the gods you dwell
From the mountain top you speak
The universe lies in your hand
All invoke your name, await your
call
All our voices sing your praise
From tlatoani to macehual
From emperor to common slave.

The song breaks up in laughter.

CACAMATZIN

It won't do friends. We have to be together. Let's start with the drums.

(Counting)

Good. Now the flutes.

(Conducting)

Song!

(Conducting)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MEXICAS

As king among the gods etc.

CACAMATZIN

Better. Now we'll add the dance.

The procession moves offstage.

IXTLILXOCHITL

Youngsters collect
chimicuiles, honey ants, meoculi,
guajes and maguey flowers. Farmers
harvest verdolagas, tecuilatl,
chiles, nopales. Fishermen draw
shrimp, fish and mextlapique from
the lake. Mouthwatering odours of
tamal, tzoalli, and huatli drift
into the streets from bakers'
ovens. The brewers too are at work
making chocolate, chicha and
pulque. Ah pulque, nectar of the
elderly who without shame might
drink until they stumbled .

A Mexica spots Xicotencatl and is suspicious. Another sees
Olid. Word goes round and in seconds the plaza is deserted.

SCENE 14

Moctezuma's rooms in the palace of Axayácatl. Moctezuma
dozes. Cuauhtémoc and Temoctzin enter unobserved.

CUAUHTÉMOC

If things get difficult with my
cousin, get me out of the room so
that you can speak to him in
private. He thinks I'm headstrong,
so he may not listen while I'm
around. And if I start pressing,
he'll think I'm after his throne.

TEMOCTZIN

And are you?

CUAUHTÉMOC

An emperor must be free. Nothing
more.

TEMOCTZIN

May the gods help us.

They embrace, then approach Moctezuma.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MOCTEZUMA

Who's that? Cuauhtémoc, Temoctzin.
We're glad to see you. How did you
get past the guards?

CUAUHTÉMOC

With gold.

TEMOCTZIN

And a jar of pulque to make them
sweet-tempered.

MOCTEZUMA

You risk freedom by coming here.

CUAUHTÉMOC

No risk is too great to see our
lord.

MOCTEZUMA

You have business. Speak.

TEMOCTZIN

The feast of Tozcatl is upon us and
the people expect you.

(Pause)

Always the emperor presides.

(Pause)

Will he come?

MOCTEZUMA

How may he go?

TEMOCTZIN

As we entered.

CUAUHTÉMOC

We promised the guards a basket of
fine jewels if they'll sleep while
you walk by.

MOCTEZUMA

They'll die when Cortés learns of
it.

CUAUHTÉMOC

Cortés is away.

MOCTEZUMA

Then Alvarado will kill them.

CUAUHTÉMOC

Still they won't resist our gold.
They're always hungry for it, like
dogs for scraps from the master's
table.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MOCTEZUMA

Alvarado's anger will be boundless
and we'll suffer for it too.

CUAUHTÉMOC

No emperor has ever failed his
people.

MOCTEZUMA

Do you misunderstand us?

CUAUHTÉMOC

If he will not lead his people,
what are they to think?

TEMOCTZIN

Cauhtémoc, we are not gentle with
our lord.

MOCTEZUMA

We may not simply walk out of here.

CUAUHTÉMOC

Why not?

MOCTEZUMA

I...we have accepted Cortés's
hospitality.

CUAUHTÉMOC

Is that what you call it? I always
thought this was a Mexican
building. Your grandfather's
palace.

MOCTEZUMA

How dare you address your sovereign
in such tones? Greater men than you
have surrendered their lives for
smaller offences.

CUAUHTÉMOC

My lord I beg forgiveness.

TEMOCTZIN

Perhaps with our lord's permission
Cauhtémoc will guard the entrance.

MOCTEZUMA

Yes. Go. Keep watch, while I confer
with our General.

Cauhtémoc leaves.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

TEMOCTZIN

A fine young warrior, despite his youth.

MOCTEZUMA

Too headstrong for these times.

(Pause)

Don't take our actions for weakness, General. Everything we have done has been to protect our nation, though its ruin may press hard on us. That's why I've sent for Xicotencátl.

TEMOCTZIN

The Tlaxcalan? He's an ally of the Spaniards.

MOCTEZUMA

His people and ours share the same blood and the same gods. The same rain quenches our thirst, the same sun caresses us. The Tlaxcalans aren't foreigners. Our enmity with them is a family quarrel. We may fight with them, we may sacrifice their warriors to the gods, but we don't wish for their extinction. Not so the Spaniards. Their god is not ours. They tell us he's gentle, but we see that he's violent, full of hatred, that he can't be appeased; that he is jealous, greedy for the world; that he loves only Catholics and is indifferent to the fate of our people. If we don't defeat this god and his army, the Tlaxcalans will disappear as surely as the Mexica. We'll survive only as slaves. That's the message we'll give Xicotencátl. He must leave the Spaniards and join with us.

TEMOCTZIN

He won't do it.

MOCTEZUMA

Nothing is impossible if your emperor wills it.

TEMOCTZIN

We've fought the Tlaxcalans for generations.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

MOCTEZUMA

And always defeated them. That's why they'll accept our offer of peace.

TEMOCTZIN

But...

(He stops himself)

Very well lord. An alliance with the Tlaxcalans will be a happy event. Still your people need you at the festival.

MOCTEZUMA

The festival isn't so important.

TEMOCTZIN

Hear me out, lord. We have a plan. Cortés has gone to the coast with the best Spanish soldiers. Those that remain will come to the festival, for they like to see our customs. Let's welcome them, draw them in. At first they'll be nervous and watchful, but after a few days they'll relax. That will be the time to strike. Our soldiers are ready and trained. When you give the signal, we'll seize weapons and rid us of this Spanish plague.

MOCTEZUMA

What of the guns?

TEMOCTZIN

They're too few to kill us all. And for those who die, the end will be glorious.

MOCTEZUMA

It's a brave plan.

TEMOCTZIN

Then you agree?

MOCTEZUMA

We promised Cortés there'd be peace during his absence.

TEMOCTZIN

An emperor may break a promise.

MOCTEZUMA

If we so decide.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

TEMOCTZIN

Then it's settled.

MOCTEZUMA

We've not yet decided.

TEMOCTZIN

Lord, our nation is at stake here.
You, our emperor, are in danger.

MOCTEZUMA

What if the plan doesn't work?

TEMOCTZIN

All the military is behind it.

MOCTEZUMA

You say we must lead the people.
It's true.

(Pause)

We must.

(Pause)

But I... we...can't.

Temoctzin looks directly at Moctezuma for the first time.

MOCTEZUMA

You look at us.

TEMOCTZIN

I looked for my emperor.

MOCTEZUMA

We can't move.

TEMOCTZIN

Because of promises to criminals?

MOCTEZUMA

No.

TEMOCTZIN

An emperor intercedes with the gods
on our behalf. He protects us. His
wisdom is absolute; his justice
likewise. He's unbending. He's the
noblest among us, the most
courageous, the fiercest warrior
and the sternest judge. All the
world fears his anger for it is
terrible. But he fears nothing.

MOCTEZUMA

If you respect your emperor, say no
more. He is not as you say. He
can't move.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (6)

TEMOCTZIN

Can't?

MOCTEZUMA

Legend tells that the sun will drag us back into his fire and the world will burn to ashes. Since the strangers arrived, I'm hounded by visions of our city in flames. I see agony in the faces of our people. The eyes of these Catholics are full of greed and violence. Our gods lie broken in the streets. They can't protect us. Nothing can protect us. Nothing.

TEMOCTZIN

You're afraid!

MOCTEZUMA

Yes.

Cuauhtémoc appears, breathless.

CUAUHTÉMOC

The Tlaxcalan is on his way. We must leave.

TEMOCTZIN

Good-bye then emperor.

CUAUHTÉMOC

What's going on?

TEMOCTZIN

Let's go.

CUAUHTÉMOC

May the gods keep you lord.

They begin to leave.

MOCTEZUMA

(Calling)

Temoctzin. Cousin.

Moctezuma takes a step towards Cuauhtémoc and Temoctzin. The movement reveals that he is chained to the wall.

MOCTEZUMA

Forgive. We must forgive.

CUAUHTÉMOC

Those things?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (7)

MOCTEZUMA

The Spaniards call them chains.

CUAUHTÉMOC

We'll pull them out. Now.

TEMOCTZIN

Leave it. We have to go. If they
find us here they'll do the same
to us. Hurry.

Temoctzin ushers Cuauhtémoc away. They exit from a side
entrance just as Xicotencatl appears. Moctezuma resumes his
seat, concealing the chain with his robes.

XICOTENCATL

You wanted to talk?

MOCTEZUMA

Ah! Xicotencatl. We were expecting
you.

XICOTENCATL

You had visitors.

MOCTEZUMA

Did we?

XICOTENCATL

With permission I hope.

MOCTEZUMA

Moctezuma needs permission only of
himself.

XICOTENCATL

Not what I heard.

MOCTEZUMA

They know you're here?

XICOTENCATL

They know most of what goes on
around here.

MOCTEZUMA

You didn't tell them you were
coming?

XICOTENCATL

If you say so.

MOCTEZUMA

We've a proposal that will please
you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (8)

XICOTENCATL

Really? Let me guess. You want help to get out of here.

MOCTEZUMA

For that we don't need help. We are free.

XICOTENCATL

Free? Is that what you call this? Free? Tell you what, if you're free, let's go for a walk. Or maybe a canoe trip. I hear you love fishing. I've learned to like it too as a matter of fact since coming to Mexico. We Tlaxcalans aren't used to living so well. We had to send our wealth to you, see: food, jewels, textiles, our prettiest girls. You name it, we sent it. That's the role of slaves and vassals: to supply the masters with whatever they want. When you asked to see me, I thought 'what in the name of all the gods does Moctezuma want now? Hasn't he squeezed enough out of us?' Worst of the lot you are. Your grandpa Axayácatl, when he was emperor, never demanded too much. Had a human side to him. Sympathized with the underdog. Know what I mean? No, you wouldn't. You always were spiteful, weren't you, Moctezuma? Liked us to eat dirt and be grateful. Well here I am to thank you again for your past kindness, and to offer to take you fishing.

MOCTEZUMA

You mock us.

XICOTENCATL

Would I do such a thing?.

MOCTEZUMA

What about our proposal? We offer peace and...

XICOTENCATL

Peace! That would be delightful.

MOCTEZUMA

Together we can push the Spaniards back into the sea.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (9)

XICOTENCATL

I understand. And I see your point. We're natives of this land, after all, whilst the Spaniards are newcomers. Only trouble is, the Spaniards are our friends whilst you lot, the Mexica, are our worst enemies. Let me tell you something. For the first time in a hundred years, my people don't have you on our backs. And who do we thank for that? The Spaniards. They treat us like human beings. Most of the time anyway. Maybe they think we're inferior to them; but so do you. Sorry Moctezuma, not interested.

MOCTEZUMA

Then why did you come here?

XICOTENCATL

Since I was boy, I've dreamed of standing up to you, of telling you our gods are as good as yours. And I dreamed too of the day when my people would take revenge for what you've done them. That day has come. And it feels good.

MOCTEZUMA

The Spaniards will crush you, just as a they try to crush the Mexica.

XICOTENCATL

We'll take that chance.

MOCTEZUMA

In that case, after we've finished off the Spaniards we'll have to destroy you, too. Is that what you want?

XICOTENCATL

(Laughing)

Finish off the Spaniards? That's a good one. You've become a comic in captivity. Can hardly wait to see their reaction. They'll die laughing. Maybe that's what you're hoping for. I'll go and tell them right away. Pity you can't go fishing. Would've done both of us good to get away for half a day. Maybe next time.

(He walks off still talking)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (10)

XICOTENCATL (CONT'D)

Finish off the Spaniards. Really,
you wonder what world he lives in.
Decadence, that's what it is.
They've had it too easy those
Mexica. Lost touch with reality.
Finish off...I ask you.

MOCTEZUMA

Help us gods.

SCENE 15

Palace of Axayácatl - Alvarado's office. Olid enters with Xicotencatl.

ALVARADO

Well?

OLID

The streets are filled with music,
and the smell of baking.

ALVARADO

They've stopped deliveries of food.

OLID

Apparently everyone fasts a little
before the celebrations begin.

ALVARADO

What about military preparations?

OLID

Nothing so far. We watch them as
discreetly as possible. Though as
soon as they notice us they melt
away.

ALVARADO

They're plotting something for
sure.

ALVARADO

Can our Tlaxcalan friend help us?

XICOTENCATL

They're planning an attack during
the festival.

OLID

How do you know this?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

XICOTENCATL

Got it from the horse's mouth. Moctezuma tried to set me against you. 'We're going to defeat Alvarado,' he said. 'Come and join us.' 'Why would we do that?' I said. So he said, 'We're all Mexicans together, that's why'. 'No we're not,' I said, 'You're Mexicans. We're Tlaxcalans. And if I had my way your head would be on a pole in the main square.'

ALVARADO

When will the attack take place?

XICOTENCATL

On the last day of the festival, when you least expect it. But we can attack them first. The warriors' dance is tomorrow. All the best soldiers are on parade; and weapons are forbidden by law.

OLID

Captain, we have to tread carefully. General Cortés gave strict instructions...

ALVARADO

What do you expect me to do? Besides, Cortés knows my views. And he may already be on his way back to Spain in chains.

OLID

But suppose he returns to find us at war?

ALVARADO

He'll have to deal with the facts on the ground.

OLID

There could be a court-martial.

ALVARADO

Ah! You studied to be a lawyer.

OLID

My concern is to protect you.

ALVARADO

Mine is to protect our men and our position. Both are under threat.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

ALVARADO (CONT'D)

The Mexicans have turned hostile as I knew they would. I say we will go armed to the fiesta. Are you with me or not?

OLID

I obey orders.

ALVARADO

Good to hear that.

A distant howl. The voice is Moctezuma's.

ALVARADO

What in god's name is that?

OLID

Must be the dogs.

ALVARADO

See to it, will you?

OLID

I will.

ALVARADO

And summon the men to meet me in the courtyard.

Olid leaves.

ALVARADO (CONT'D)

I underestimated you, chief. Now I owe you a word of thanks.

XICOTENCATL

It is I who thank you. We've waited long for this moment.

Exeunt. The howls cease suddenly.

ACT 2

SCENE 1

The main square before the Great Temple. Drums. A group of Mexicas dance. Other Mexicas watch, swaying to the rhythm, chanting.

MEXICAS

Today we greet the sacrifice
 A god must live a god must die
 When life is lost, new life is
 found
 The flowers of eternity
 Will grow upon this sacred ground.
 We sing so that the earth will last
 So that the mountains never fall
 Nor dry the waters of the lake
 In dance and song we celebrate
 The bounty that the heavens make.

The dancers form a circle, in the middle of which a young warrior stands in robes and headdress. As the dance intensifies, heavily armed Spaniards and Tlaxcalans take position, blocking ways of escape. One or two Mexicas notice, but they are caught up in the ceremony. The drumming stops; the chanting also. Dancers kneel before the warrior in the centre. Four young women cling to him. The others bow. The central figure raises his arms as if about to declaim. Alvarado draws his sword, lifts it and cries:

ALVARADO

Death!

Spaniards and Tlaxcalans attack. Slaughter turns into a stylistic dance of stabbing, chopping and thrusting.

IXTLILXOCHITL

Three thousand of our finest died
 that day. Screams rent the air.
 Heads rolled loose across the
 square, people ran with their
 entrails in their hands, bodies
 piled upon bodies. Hunters and
 hunted slithered on stones that ran
 with blood. And when it was over, a
 terrible stench rose from the
 pavements.

The Mexica clear away their dead.

CACAMATZIN

We only came to sleep
 We only came to dream
 (MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CACAMATZIN (CONT'D)

Do not believe, it is not true
We came to live on earth.

ECATZIN

Do not seek meaning in this life.
For you will find none. Our time
here is fleeting, joys are scarred
by fate and time. Only in the
region of mystery, in the great
mountain home of the gods, do we
find peace.

MEXICAS

We only came to sleep etc.

ECATZIN

In your grief remember that those
who are fallen now dwell in a
better world, where we will soon
join them.

MEXICAS

We only came to sleep etc.

ECATZIN

Mourn, mourn Mexico. Grief assails
us. Beg the gods to free our
emperor from the Spanish chains,
for we need him now.

Cuauhtémoc appears.

CUAUHTÉMOC

Enough Ecatzin. There will be time
enough to mourn.

The Mexicas grow silent and attentive.

CUAUHTÉMOC

What has befallen is nothing beside
the threat that faces us. Our city
is still intact. And it is still
ours. We must secure it. We must
eject the foreigners. We must fight
back.

ECATZIN

A month of mourning. The law so
demands.

CUAUHTÉMOC

The times forbid.

ECATZIN

Only Moctezuma can change our
customs.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CUAUHTÉMOC

He's a prisoner! The Spaniards have defiled him.

ECATZIN

He's still our king.

CUAUHTÉMOC

He gave himself to the Spaniards.

ECATZIN

It's not our role to question his wisdom.

CUAUHTÉMOC

He's a fool.

ECATZIN

Don't say so. I beg you Cuauhtémoc. Nothing good will come if we reject our own.

TEMOCTZIN

(Quietly to Cuauhtémoc)

Careful. We must carry the people with us.

(Loudly)

I, Temoctzin, bring the emperor's word. He says that we must leave mourning and fight.

ECATZIN

Without our emperor? It cannot be.

CUAUHTÉMOC

Ecatzin, you've known me since I was a child.

ECATZIN

I held you in my arms the day you were born.

CUAUHTÉMOC

Didn't you call on the gods to protect me?

ECATZIN

Of course I did. And they answered because you've become a fine soldier.

CUAUHTÉMOC

Now the gods call upon me to protect our way of life.

(To the Mexica)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

CUAUHTÉMOC (CONT'D)

They call upon every soldier of
Mexico to fight for his country.
Wherever you see a Spaniard or a
Tlaxcalan, attack him. No one is to
take food to the Spaniards. No
water will reach them. We're at
war.

MEXICAS

From the heaven's sacred heights
The winds of war burn and roar
Huizilopochli reveals his face
And calls the Mexica to war
And calls the Mexica to war.
Arrayed upon the battlefield
Hordes of enemy foregather
Rise up, rise up Mexica
Yours the glory and the honour
Yours the glory and the honour

CUAUHTÉMOC

Take up arms. Mexica. Defend
yourselves.

The Mexicas leave. Ecatzin follows muttering.

TEMOCTZIN

Will it work?

CUAUHTÉMOC

Give them a week and we'll be
dining on them

TEMOCTZIN

They don't taste so good,
apparently.

They share the humour.

TEMOCTZIN

All the same, let's not forget they
have the Tlaxcalans on their side
and several other tribes as well.

CUAUHTÉMOC

Every Mexica is worth a hundred of
them.

TEMOCTZIN

If we were properly led, perhaps.
But with our present troubles.

CUAUHTÉMOC

You mean Moctezuma?

TEMOCTZIN

Will our people fight without him?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

CUAUHTÉMOC

We must make them.

The leave.

SCENE 2

Cortés's quarters, palace of Axayácatl

IXTLILXOCHITL

War was a game to us Mexicans. A soldier's job was to take prisoners. Killing them was the priests' responsibility. And it was all done correctly, to satisfy the gods and with due honour to the victim. Cold-blooded murder? Rape? Butchery of women and children? These were European imports. Alvarado's massacre changed the terms of war. So we ringed the palace of Axayácatl with hatred and thoughts of revenge. Spaniards who ventured into the streets were liable to be murdered. Cortés came back from the coast, just as he predicted. And with more soldiers. But here he found what he most feared, a city grown violent and resentful.

CORTÉS

You're telling me the Mexica attacked without warning?

ALVARADO

No, not exactly.

CORTÉS

Then what exactly?

ALVARADO

We heard they were going to attack.

CORTÉS

You heard?

ALVARADO

I sent out spies. The Tlaxcalans confirmed...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CORTÉS

The Tlaxcalans! There's nothing they want more than to get at the Mexica.

ALVARADO

You instructed me to use them as spies. I had no reason to doubt their evidence.

CORTÉS

What evidence?

ALVARADO

Moctezuma had given the go-ahead to kill us all at the feast of Tozcatl.

CORTÉS

He told you his plans beforehand, I suppose.

ALVARADO

The evidence was strong enough. Our forces were depleted by your absence. I had no choice.

CORTÉS

I think you did.

ALVARADO

If you doubt my word...

CORTÉS

I do doubt it. You sought neither the truth, nor peace. I hear you killed above three thousand. Unarmed men, and even women and children. Or is that hearsay too? I planned to deliver this city intact to our Spain. Now, we'll have to conquer it.

ALVARADO

Maybe you can show them you're angry with me. Then they won't blame you.

CORTÉS

They'll say either that I don't keep my word, or that I can't control my officers. Which alternative do you prefer? Back home, I'd have you shot for disobeying orders. Here we need every man we can get.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CORTÉS (CONT'D)

But if you cross me again, it'll be the last time so help me god. Is that clear? Now get out. Oh, one more thing. From now on you'll report to Sandoval.

ALVARADO

Demotion?

CORTÉS

It's the least I can do.

ALVARADO

I don't accept...

CORTÉS

That's all.

Alvarado makes as if to argue, changes his mind, bows curtly and leaves. As he does so, he crosses paths with Sandoval who pointedly greets him as a subordinate.

SANDOVAL

Lieutenant.

Alvarado hesitates, outraged; then marches off.

CORTÉS

Don't rub salt in his wound. Let it be enough that you have his place.

SANDOVAL

General.

CORTÉS

How bad is it?

SANDOVAL

We're besieged. They've cut off water to the palace. The men are digging a well in the courtyard, but supplies will be limited.

CORTÉS

Is this Moctezuma's doing?

SANDOVAL

He says not.

Olid enters.

CORTÉS

What is it?

OLID

They've closed the market. There's no food.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

CORTÉS

Were you involved with the
massacre, Olid?

OLID

I obeyed orders, General; and led
my men.

CORTÉS

You acted like a soldier.

OLID

If I may speak freely. I thought
the slaughter unnecessary.

CORTÉS

Did you say so?

OLID

I believe I did.

CORTÉS

You believe? Have you forgotten?

OLID

I may not have protested as I
should.

CORTÉS

Go on.

OLID

Alvarado stood in your place,
General. I assumed his will was
yours.

CORTÉS

And if I ordered you to murder an
unarmed man, you'd do it, I
suppose.

OLID

A soldier obeys orders.

Olmedo enters quietly.

CORTÉS

And if it were a woman you were
told to kill? A child? An old man?
What about you Father Olmedo?
Didn't you object?

OLMEDO

Nothing I could say would have
changed things, General. You sent
for me?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

CORTÉS

(to Olmedo)

Tell me, are the Mexica human like us, or a species of animal?

OLMEDO

We have referred the matter to his holiness the Pope.

CORTÉS

I want your opinion.

OLMEDO

It is not a priest's role to offer opinions, General. But to accept.

CORTÉS

Our holy fathers don't believe in thinking. Well then perhaps you'll be gracious enough to tell us what you accept, if you will.

OLMEDO

About what, General?

CORTÉS

Are the Mexicans god's children or not?

OLMEDO

God's children?

CORTÉS

Yes. People.

OLMEDO

Most certainly they're people. But I fear they're not like us. They worship false gods. They eat human flesh and drink the blood of their victims.

CORTÉS

Does that mean a good Christian may slaughter them like beasts?

OLMEDO

Better to kill them than to allow them to kill a member of god's holy flock.

OLID

Father Olmedo has a point, General.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

CORTÉS

The clergy always does. Answer me this, how are we to deliver these creatures to the king, how are we to save their souls, if we butcher them?

OLMEDO

First, we must learn how to preserve our own lives. Our men are hungry and the Mexicans seem every day more hostile.

CORTÉS

We'll get Mocetezuma to calm things down. Go to him. The four of you.

SANDOVAL

With respect, General, he wants to see you.

CORTÉS

He'll not see me. Tell him that. He won't see me until his people are quiet and peaceful.

SANDOVAL

It is a heavy insult for an emperor.

CORTÉS

Then let him be insulted.

All leave except Cortés.

CORTÉS (CONT'D)

God help us all if he doesn't put a stop to this violence. Less than two months ago, I controlled him like a puppet. Now I may have to beg him for life.

SCENE 3

Moctezuma's quarters, palace of Axayácatl.

IXTLILXOCHITL

They spent a week vainly urging Moctezuma to pacify his people. Cooped up in Axayácatl's palace, the Spaniards were weakening daily from lack of food. Their ammunition was running out too. In the end Cortés had to give way.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

IXTLILXOCHITL (CONT'D)

Moctezuma didn't win many disputes with Cortés, but he got his meeting.

MOCTEZUMA

You've come at last. We've been asking for you. Are you rested from your travels?

CORTÉS

Your people are riotous, Moctezuma. We came to your city in peace, and you've greeted us with war.

MOCTEZUMA

Your words are hostile

CORTÉS

They are full of anger.

MOCTEZUMA

You speak of peace but war is what you have brought. We've lost thousands of lives to your peace.

CORTÉS

In my absence.

MOCTEZUMA

You didn't order your soldiers to attack?

CORTÉS

No.

MOCTEZUMA

Then your deputy does not obey you.

CORTÉS

He found out you were planning to kill us.

MOCTEZUMA

Who says this?

CORTÉS

We have our sources.

MOCTEZUMA

If it were so Moctezuma would have made no promises.

CORTÉS

Then there must be rebels among your people, trouble-makers, fanatics.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MOCTEZUMA

Likely they are foreigners.
Visitors to the city who come to
stir up trouble

CORTÉS

For the sake of our friendship, I'd
like to take your word for it.

MOCTEZUMA

Our friendship!

CORTÉS

Haven't we been friends since our
first meeting?

MOCTEZUMA

(Showing his chains)

Are these irons the gift of a
friend? You've brought ruin to our
world.

CORTÉS

Your people surround the palace.
They stone us and hurl abuse. These
senseless hostilities must end.
They brings only evil. As it is I
have to hold back my soldiers from
taking revenge.

MOCTEZUMA

It is we who are injured.

CORTÉS

Your warriors have killed several
of my men.

MOCTEZUMA

Yours have killed thousands of
mine.

CORTÉS

We act only in self-defence. The
laws of heaven and earth are on our
side.

MOCTEZUMA

Here it is we who make the law.

CORTÉS

You realize we could destroy this
city?

MOCTEZUMA

Even you are not so powerful.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

CORTÉS

Aren't we? We demand peace, and quickly if we're to avoid a catastrophe. Go out to your people. Tell them to stop fighting. They can't defeat us. Their only reward for violence will be death.

MOCTEZUMA

And if we refuse?

CORTÉS

You'll be responsible for the consequences.

MOCTEZUMA

Your request comes late. Our people are angry and their pride wounded.

CORTÉS

Then let's begin to heal them.

Moctezuma again shows his chains.

MOCTEZUMA

What are they to think of these?

CORTÉS

I'll have them removed.

MOCTEZUMA

You bear down on us. And we long for release. We'll send our people back to their homes. We'll give them your promise of safety.

CORTÉS

I'm glad, and relieved.

Cortés makes to embrace Moctezuma, but the latter shrinks from his touch and the gesture ends in a stiff handshake.

MOCTEZUMA

How is our daughter?

CORTÉS

I believe she may be expecting a happiness.

MOCTEZUMA

She's the loveliest.... Did I tell you? We are pleased.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

CORTÉS

Yes it's become a family matter.
I'll have you escorted to the
palace roof. You can address your
warriors from there. Once calm is
restored we can be as before.
You're a good man. I say so as a
Christian - as one day I hope you
will be.

Cortés leaves

MOCTEZUMA

Their god may be powerful, but his
people are savages. We must hope
that civilization will survive this
dark passage.

SCENE 4

Outside the palace of Axayácatl. Mexica, some armed with
lances, shout for Moctezuma. The emperor appears above them
(on the roof of the palace). Olid escorts him. The crowd
gathers, curious and restless.

FIRST MEXICAN

What's going on?

AHUÍZOTL

It's the emperor.

SECOND MEXICAN

He should go back down to his cell.

THIRD MEXICAN

Spanish lackey. Shame on him.

OLID

(To Moctezuma)

Say something. Speak to them.

MOCTEZUMA

They're restless.

OLID

Then cheer them up. Do it.

MOCTEZUMA

Mexica...Hear us.

Uproar.

THIRD MEXICAN

Take him down.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FIRST MEXICAN
What does he want with us?

AHUÍZOTL
Let him speak.

SECOND MEXICAN
Why should we listen to a traitor?

MOCTEZUMA
(through interruptions)
Mexico. We are among you again.
Listen now to your lord.

The noise subsides, but not entirely.

MOCTEZUMA
You see that we are alive and well.
We live freely with our friends the
Spaniards.

THIRD MEXICAN
His friends, not ours.

Jeers.

SECOND MEXICAN
If you're free, why don't you live
in your own home?

FIRST MEXICAN
That's right enough.

THIRD MEXICAN
Why aren't you with us?

AHUÍZOTL
Let's hear him out at least.

THIRD MEXICAN
Aren't you his nephew, Ahuízotl?

AHUÍZOTL
What of it?

THIRD MEXICAN
You'd better keep quiet, that's
what.

MOCTEZUMA
Mexicas...The strangers want peace.
As we do.

THIRD MEXICAN
They hate us. So does their god.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MOCTEZUMA

No. Their god loves us.

CUAUHTÉMOC

Ask Ecatzin. He'll tell us.

SECOND MEXICAN

Good idea!

MEXICAS

Where's Ecatzin?

(Chanting)

Ecatzin, Ecatzin etc.

Ecatzin appears. The crowd gives way.

CUAUHTÉMOC

Ecatzin. We need your wisdom.
Moctezuma says the Spanish god is
not our enemy. What do you say?

ECATZIN

Well. That's a hard question. I
must say. All things considered.

THIRD MEXICAN

So?

MEXICAS

Speak.

ECATZIN

Well to be honest.

(To Moctezuma)

Excuse me lord, I beg you. I think
their god doesn't approve of us.

The crowds roars. Moctezuma waits until the noise subsides.

MOCTEZUMA

Ecatzin isn't a god and can't see
the truth. Whereas...

SECOND MEXICAN

Whereas you're an emperor and can't
see anything.

Jeers.

MOCTEZUMA

Mexica, my people....You must
understand. We can't fight the
Spaniards. At least not without
grievous loss. Consider our
children, the old, our families.
How many will weep at your death?

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

MOCTEZUMA (CONT'D)

No, it cannot be. We must lay down our arms and consider only the way of peace.

CUAUHTÉMOC

What's that son-of-a-bitch saying? We should give up our freedom? The Spaniards have made a coward of him.

THIRD MEXICAN

We need a new emperor.

FIRST MEXICAN

That's right.

SECOND MEXICAN

We'll have no more of that spineless creature.

MEXICAS

Away with Moctezuma. Stone him, stone him.

AHUÍZOTL

No. No.

MEXICAS

Stone him. Away with him.

AHUÍZOTL

Gods help him.

Several missiles hit Moctezuma who collapses and is helped off rapidly by Olid and Spanish guards.

SCENE 5

IXTLILXOCHITL

And so power passed from Moctezuma. And his life also. Some say he died of grief and shame, some that a stone killed him. Only the Spaniards knew for certain, and they weren't saying. They sent his corpse to us, though, along with a dozen of his attendants. With their throats cut.

CACAMATZIN

The eagle weeps, the jaguar laments
The fruit and flower of Mexico has gone

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CACAMATZIN (CONT'D)

And in their place a strange god
stands and stares
Fierce and boasting of a battle
won.

MEXICAS

Mictlantecutli, lord of the dead
Receive this broken staff as bread
Receive this soul into your night
Hide his misdeeds from our sight.

CACAMATZIN

The ashes of this lord will be
dispersed
As seeds before the wind let them
fly
May they enrich the earth where'er
they fall
So that his memory will never die.

MEXICAS

Mictlantecutli, lord of the dead
etc.

IXTLILXOCHITL

I can see him still as he was on
that last day, shrivelled like a
withered reed. We sensed then that
the gods had abandoned us. That we
were alone on earth. And to live we
would have to fight.

CUAUHTÉMOC

With Moctezuma's gone, we can
concentrate on defending ourselves.

AHUÍZOTL

That's what my uncle was trying to
do.

TEMOCTZIN

Moctezuma was right about one
thing. We don't have an answer to
their weapons.

CUAUHTÉMOC

But we have numbers. If we lose
twenty thousand for every Spaniard
killed we'll still defeat them.

AHUÍZOTL

But at what cost?

TEMOCTZIN

Maybe not so high, if we starve
them out.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CUAUHTÉMOC
That could take months.

TEMOCTZIN
Does it matter?

CUAUHTÉMOC
Why wait? We don't leave a wound to fester; we clean it out.

TEMOCTZIN
Wounds don't spit fire. But fire needs fuel. They lack food and good water. Sooner or later they'll break out. That will be the time to attack. When they're running through the streets, half-starved and frightened.

IXTLILXOCHITL
And so it was. Every day, the Spaniards sent out marauders to search for food. They raided gardens; stole animals from the zoo. At night they would retreat back into the Axayácatl's palace and we would surround it again. Day after day this went on. But as Temoctzin had predicted, hunger at last drove them out.

SCENE 6

Outside the gates of Mexico City - Tenochtitlan.

IXTLILXOCHITL
They tried to sneak away quietly one night. But we were waiting. And as they hurried along the causeway to the shore, so we harried them.

The Mexica attack.

CORTÉS
The treasure! Keep hold of the treasure!

IXTLILXOCHITL
Treasure - our looted gold - almost killed him.

Spanish soldiers drag a heavy cart.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CORTÉS
Sandoval, the treasure. Olid.

OLID
We can't hold it.

OLMEDO
God save us!

CORTÉS
(Handing a sword to
Olmedo)
Take this and lead the women out of
here.

OLMEDO
I cannot.

CORTÉS
You'll do it or you'll fight me.

Olmedo leads away Tecuichpo and several others.

TEMOCTZIN
Now at them.

The Mexica rush the cart. Cortés is momentarily surrounded.

TEMOCTZIN
Take Cortés.

CUAUHTÉMOC
Better to kill him.

AHUÍZOTL
We need him for sacrifice.

CUAUHTÉMOC
We need him dead.

AHUÍZOTL
Alive and the gods will thank us.

TEMOCTZIN
What does it matter?

The argument saves Cortés who slips through the cordon.

CUAUHTÉMOC
Stop him.

SANDOVAL
Now General away.

TEMOCTZIN
It's too late.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

ALVARADO

The gold.

SANDOVAL

We'll have to leave it.

ALVARADO

No.

SANDOVAL

You want to lose your life?

ALVARADO

Are we cowards that we won't fight for it?

OLID

Don't be a fool, Alvarado.

ALVARADO

Who's a fool?

CORTÉS

Break it up, both of you.

Fighting, the Spaniards retreat pursued by the Mexica until lost to sight. Cuauhtémoc and Temoctzin are left alone on stage.

TEMOCTZIN

We failed to take Cortés, but at least they're gone.

CUAUHTÉMOC

Let's hope so, Temoctzin.

TEMOCTZIN

(examining the cart)

They've melted the gold into bars.
All that beautiful work destroyed.
What's wrong with these Spaniards?

CUAUHTÉMOC

That stuff has become a danger to us. We should dump it in the lake.

TEMOCTZIN

What need if we've seen off the enemy?

CUAUHTÉMOC

I'm not sure that we have. Is Cortés the kind of man to give up?

He tries to shift the cart, but it is heavy.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

CUAUHTÉMOC (CONT'D)

Are you going to help or watch me
do it?

They push together at the cart. Other Mexica arrive to take over the work, delicately moving Cuauhtémoc and Temoctzin out of the way.

TEMOCTZIN

The people bow to you. You're next
in line to become emperor. Once an
emperor, it's hard not also to
become a god.

Cuauhtémoc laughs and throws an arm round Temoctzin's shoulders. Together they march off behind the cart.

SCENE 7

The great square.

IXTLILXOCHITL

"Noche Triste", sad night. That's
what the Spaniards called their
defeat. But for us a triumph. We
felt as if a curse had lifted from
us. We mourned our dead, but
rejoiced that we had come through
hardship and were free once more.
As for the gods...

ECATZIN

We must respect them all, thank
them all, give them all
nourishment. Huizilopochtli for
courage in war, Tezcatlipoca who
sees and knows everything,
Quetzalcoatl who came from afar to
watch over us. And...where was I?

IXTLILXOCHITL

(As from the audience)
Thanking the gods.

ECATZIN

Ah yes. We've lost an emperor, but
a new one will arise. Our gods
smile on us. They'll send the
Spaniards to live among the
Tlaxcalans. Or maybe to return
across the sea in their big towers.
And the Mexica will stand upright
again.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

IXTLILXOCHITL

That, at any rate, was what Ecatzin promised. He didn't mention what the Spaniards left behind. I don't mean the gold. We cared little enough for that; nor the weapons that spout fire, for we knew nothing of how they worked. No. They left something else, a foulness that crept into our houses, and lingered in the air we breathed. A sickness of eruptions, blindness and death. They had a name for it: smallpox.

ECATZIN

I didn't mention it, because I didn't see.

Faded light. As ixtlilzochitl speaks, we see Mexicas, lying, stumbling, tended by others. A lament in the background.

MEXICAS (O.S.)

We only came to sleep
We only came to dream
Do not believe, it is not true
We came to live on earth.

IXTLILXOCHITL

Thousands died of the sickness,
thousands more of hunger because no
one tended the fields.

As darkness falls we continue to hear the lament. Ecatzin, weak, reclines while acolytes attend him. He is blind. Cuauhtémoc enters quietly.

ECATZIN

Who is it?

CUAUHTÉMOC

Don't get up, Ecatzin.

ECATZIN

Cuauhtémoc.

CUAUHTÉMOC

Yes.

ECATZIN

You escaped the sickness.

CUAUHTÉMOC

Ololhiuqui gave me protection.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

ECATZIN

You shouldn't have come.

CUAUHTÉMOC

They tell me you've recovered.

ECATZIN

The fever has gone. But it carried away my eyes.

CUAUHTÉMOC

Let's give thanks you're still with us. So many are lost.

ECATZIN

A priest who can't see the sun?
What use is that?

CUAUHTÉMOC

The people don't need your eyes,
they need your wisdom.

ECATZIN

My wisdom is false. The gods have shown my blindness to the world.

CUAUHTÉMOC

I need you.

ECATZIN

You?

CUAUHTÉMOC

You've always been a father to me,
to all of us.

ECATZIN

I'm a piece of scrap now; an old man waiting for the gods to call him. Don't touch me. You'll catch my disease.

CUAUHTÉMOC

If it's yours, it will do for me also.

ECATZIN

Why do you come to torment me with this love?

CUAUHTÉMOC

You're part of us, Ecatzin. Why would we fight the strangers if not to keep what we are and what we have? I was hoping you'd do me a favour.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

ECATZIN

A favour? In my condition? What are you talking about?

CUAUHTÉMOC

Didn't you use to say I'd make a good successor to Moctezuma?

ECATZIN

That's true.

CUAUHTÉMOC

Well I've been elected.

ECATZIN

Even in these times it makes me happy to know our people think of you as I do.

CUAUHTÉMOC

So you'll conduct the ceremony?

ECATZIN

I didn't say that.

CUAUHTÉMOC

But you will?

ECATZIN

There must be other priests who survived.

CUAUHTÉMOC

None would do it as well as you.

ECATZIN

But look at me!

CUAUHTÉMOC

I see a father and my best guide. And I hear his voice.

ECATZIN

I suppose I'll have to try. You always had a way of getting round me.

SCENE 8

Daylight. The great temple.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TEMOCTZIN

We electors speak with the voice of our ancestors, with the wisdom of past kings. 'Behold,' they told us, 'the raiments of all the sovereigns of Mexico. Hold them like a jewel in your hands. Choose the one who most pleases you.' And so we have chosen.

Cuauhtémoc enters and stands beneath the golden disc where we had first seen Moctezuma. Ecatzin follows, holding a ceremonial headdress.

ECATZIN

Now Cuauhtémoc stands beside the gods. Though human as we are, though the greatest friend to our people, we no longer look upon him as human. For god speaks forth from his mouth; god hears all with his ears, and his lips pronounce only what is good.

Ecatzin, with help from attendants, places the headdress on Cuauhtémoc. All kneel - including Ecatzin.

CUAUHTÉMOC

No. Stand up Mexica.

The people stand, puzzled and murmuring. Attendants assist Ecatzin to stand.

CUAUHTÉMOC (CONT'D)

We are your emperor. But we are still of you. We will live here on earth only as you live. You are not to kneel before us as you knelt before other emperors. Prostration is for lesser creatures, for slaves, for enemies who beg for mercy. The Mexica aren't slaves but lords and nobles, every one. You will not lower your gaze in our presence but will look us in the eye and treat us as a brother. Our nation grieves. Who among us has not lost a loved one to fire, sword or disease? But our wounds will heal. And when the Spaniards return, they will find a proud nation ready to defend her home. We have spoken.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

AHUÍZOTL

But we've already beaten the Spaniards. They ran away like dogs.

CUAUHTÉMOC

Even as we speak they are on their way back. Xicotencatl with ten thousand Tlaxcalans marches with them. They come ready for war, their swords sharpened, their armour polished and shining.

ECATZIN

With respect, lord, a month of celebration is ordained for your inauguration. To abandon the sacred rites...

CUAUHTÉMOC

Until the Spaniards have gone from our land, there will be no celebration.

ECATZIN

First no funeral, then no celebration. The gods won't like it that's all I can say.

CUAUHTÉMOC

You must keep them on side. We depend on you for it.

(To the Mexica)

The fight will come to all of us. And we must all hold firm.

They begin to leave.

CUAUHTÉMOC

One more thing. We will have no more appeasers who bare their backs so that the Spaniards can lash them, no curs who beg for crumbs at the foreigner's table, no pimps ready to give their daughters up to Spanish trash. No Moctezumas. Are we clear?

CUAUHTÉMOC

That is all. Look on me as you leave. Remember. I'm just a man.

(To Ecatzin)

Will you go to the temple, father?

ECATZIN

An emperor must be obeyed.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

CUAUHTÉMOC
Beg the gods to help us.

ECATZIN
I'll do my best.

CUAUHTÉMOC
(To assistants)
Go with him. See that he is cared
for. He is precious to us.

All leave except for Cuauhtémoc, Temoctzin and Ahuízotl

.

CUAUHTÉMOC
What do you think, Temoctzin?

TEMOCTZIN
We might not win this war.

CUAUHTÉMOC
No.

AHUÍZOTL
A peace treaty might satisfy them.

CUAUHTÉMOC
Did I ask you?

AHUÍZOTL
Moctezuma...

CUAUHTÉMOC
Again!

AHUÍZOTL
He understood Spanish power. That's
why he tried to accommodate.

CUAUHTÉMOC
It's not peace they're after,
Ahuízotl. But conquest. There's no
place for us in their world, except
as slaves and servants.

AHUÍZOTL
But if we can't defeat them?

TEMOCTZIN
We must defeat them.

AHUÍZOTL
The gods may be against us.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CUAUHTÉMOC

We'll fight whoever tries to
enslave us. Even the gods.

Pause.

TEMOCTZIN

The whole people are with you lord.

CUAUHTÉMOC

Then we'll not lose, will we?

Cuauhtémoc marches off.

TEMOCTZIN

Come Ahuízotl Forget Moctezuma. We
have a new emperor now and a new
war.

AHUÍZOTL

Truthfully, what are our chances?

TEMOCTZIN

I wish I knew.

SCENE 9

The Spanish camp outside Mexico City.

CORTÉS

News?

OLID

None General. They stopped us at
the gate.

CORTÉS

But did my message get through?

SANDOVAL

They said they'd take no messages
from murderers.

CORTÉS

They killed Moctezuma. Did you tell
them that?

SANDOVAL

It would not have been politic.

CORTÉS

I suppose not. Do they have a new
emperor?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SANDOVAL

We asked if there was a lord of the city to whom we could speak on your behalf.

CORTÉS

And?

SANDOVAL

They said they were all lords, so I could speak to any of them.

CORTÉS

I think we should try again.

ALVARADO

Try again! They're making fun of us. I say we go at them now. We've waited weeks here, exchanging messages. Nothing comes of it. The men are idle and grumbling.

OLID

Even the Tlaxcalans are beginning to doubt us.

CORTÉS

Why do you think I hesitate? Out of fear that we'll lose? No gentlemen. Out of fear that we'll destroy. If we can't persuade the Mexicans to let us in, we'll have to tear the city apart. Olmedo here dreams of converting a nation to the holy gospel; I of handing a jewel to the king of Spain. But we have to remember that the enemy is fanatical. In battle, they'll defend every foot of territory. We'll end up turning the city into rubble.

ALVARADO

It wouldn't be the first place destroyed in war.

OLID

Nor the last.

ALVARADO

They showed their intentions well enough when they threw us out.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

OLMEDO
 (To Alvarado)
 We'd already have Mexico in our
 hands if it weren't for...
 (He falters)

ALVARADO
 Yes father?

CORTÉS
 (to Xicotencatl)
 Will they negotiate chief?

XICOTENCATL
 I think...they will not.

ALVARADO
 Right.

OLMEDO
 This is an answer of convenience.

XICOTENCATL
 It's true that we Tlaxcalans hate
 the Mexica. They made us slaves.
 They killed my own father at the
 great temple. Tore his heart out.
 They are a vile people. I know them
 well. And I say they won't
 surrender.

CORTÉS
 Sandoval?

SANDOVAL
 We can't keep the men idle General.

CORTÉS
 All right. We'll move forward at
 dawn.

OLMEDO
 If we could avoid too much
 destruction, General...

CORTÉS
 We'll do what can, father. And what
 we must.

SCENE 10

Mexico City. Battle. Cannon. Cries of wounded men.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

IXTLILXOCHITL

For eighty days the battle raged.
We lost men in their thousands.
Street by street we fell back. I'll
give him his due, Cortés called
almost every day for negotiations.
For weeks, Cuauhtémoc refused,
until losses forced him to it.

Empty stage. Quiet. Cortés waits alone. He hears a noise.

CORTÉS

Cuauhtémoc? Is that you? Where are
you?

CUAUHTÉMOC (O.S.)

Where are your weapons?

CORTÉS

I came unarmed as agreed. There's
nothing to fear.

CUAUHTÉMOC (O.S.)

Moctezuma had nothing to fear
either.

CORTÉS

My men are distant. I'm alone.
Where the devil are you?

Cuauhtémoc emerges from behind Cortés.

CUAUHTÉMOC

Look round.

CORTÉS

There's no need for such
precaution.

CUAUHTÉMOC

You asked for this meeting.

CORTÉS

I want to persuade you to stop the
fighting. I understand your
position. You feel we attacked you
first, and we killed many of your
warriors. I regret the incident. It
happened during my absence. A
mistake.

CUAUHTÉMOC

Mistake!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CORTÉS

Fighting won't bring back those who died. We should learn the lesson and move on.

CUAUHTÉMOC

We're not fighting for them; but for ourselves. We don't want you here. This isn't your home; it's ours. Send your army back to where it came from. Then you and I can talk of peace between our nations.

CORTÉS

Our mission is to bring the true gospel to this land. And to give you the protection of his majesty the Holy Roman Emperor. Receive the word of god and the war will be over.

CUAUHTÉMOC

Give up our beliefs, submit to your rule, and we'll be safe. Is that your offer?

CORTÉS

I wouldn't put it so harshly. We bring you the truth.

CUAUHTÉMOC

Whose truth? The truth of greed? Of stolen treasure? Of slavery?

CORTÉS

I'm talking about the real world; the facts.

CUAUHTÉMOC

To us it looks like death.

CORTÉS

That's because you fight us. Submit and you'll go on living as you please.

CUAUHTÉMOC

And if we refuse?

CORTÉS

Your city will be destroyed.

CUAUHTÉMOC

So be it. Destroy us if you can. And if you can't, we'll feed you, one by one, to the gods.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

CORTÉS

You're signing your own death
warrant.

CUAUHTÉMOC

If the gods are with us, it's you
who'll die.

They part angrily.

SCENE 11

Mexico City. Battle.

IXTLILXOCHITL

And so the war went on and on and
on. Every day, the Spaniards pushed
us back a little more, squeezing us
into a smaller and smaller corner
of the city. Even when he knew we
had lost, Cuauhtémoc rallied
survivors and fought on. Only when
the last lance had been used up,
and the last scrap of food eaten,
did he admit defeat. On August 13,
1521, as the Spaniards count, the
sun rose on a city shorn of life.
Not a building left intact. The
cannon were silent, the clash of
swords and the cries of the dying
stilled. If you listened carefully,
you might hear a murmur of despair,
or the tramp of feet along the
causeway as survivors dragged
themselves into exile. Vultures
wheeled in the air. Fires
smouldered. The victors picked
their way through ruins in search
of spoils.

CACAMATZIN

Broken swords lie scattered in the
streets
Our houses burn, their walls are
stained with red
Heaps of stones stand where temples
stood
Worms and vultures feast among the
dead

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MEXICAS

A price was on our head
 Two handfuls of corn, a heap of
 flies
 Became our daily bread.

CACAMATZIN

Strangers root among the smoking
 ruins
 For gold and slaves the precious
 spoils of war
 Cries of loss and mourning rent the
 air
 An alien god has occupied our
 shore.

SCENE 12

Cuauhtémoc, Temoctzin and Ahuízotl, ragged and filthy, are brought before Cortés. The Spaniards applaud.

CORTÉS

Welcome to the emperor of Mexico.

CUAUHTÉMOC

Mexico has no emperor. I've done everything in my power to defend our country and keep it out of your hands. But the gods sided with you. Now I beg you to end my life. It will be the final act in the destruction of my city and my people.

CORTÉS

We couldn't allow that, could we?

General agreement from the Spaniards.

OLID

They could do with a bath, General.

CORTÉS

We expect you to go on ruling, Cuauhtémoc. You can stay on the throne and help to keep order here. We'll draw up your formal submission. Once that settled everything can return to normal.

OLMEDO

There's the matter of obedience to the Pope.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CORTÉS
(to Cuauhtémoc)
You'll have to become a Christian.

ALVARADO
What about the gold?

CORTÉS
(to Cuauhtémoc)
Yes. When we left the city a few months ago under unfortunate circumstances, a quantity of gold was lost. It must, of course, be returned.

TEMOCTZIN
Perhaps the Tlaxcalans took it.

AHUÍZOTL
They say some of the women sneaked out with it under their skirts.

ALVARADO
Are they making fun of us?

CORTÉS
(indicating Temoctzin and Ahuízotl)
Who are these two?

CUAUHTÉMOC
My first General and his lieutenant.

CORTÉS
Ah yes. We met before.
(to Olid)
Get rid of them.

Ahuízotl and Temoctzin are off at sword point.

CORTÉS (CONT'D)
(to Cuauhtémoc)
Now about the gold.

CUAUHTÉMOC
We have none.

CORTÉS
You're sure about that? Without your cooperation, it's hard to see how we can proceed. Don't you want to say anything?
(pause)
You must know what this means.
(pause)
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CORTÉS (CONT'D)

Let's loosen his tongue Alvarado.
You know what to do.

All exit with Cuauhtémoc.

CACAMATZIN

Suddenly the sun stood still
Noon became our night
Jaguars devoured every
Mexica in sight
Cuauhtémoc's screams are heard from
offstage.

CACAMATZIN (CONT'D)

Giants strode the earth that day
Greeted each in turn
Do not fall down, for he who falls
In Christian flames will burn.

Dim light. Cuauhtémoc reappears. He shuffles downstage, a stick in each hand. Each step is painful we are fearful that he won't make it. But at length he does. He surveys the audience.

CUAUHTÉMOC

They poured oil on my feet and set
them alight. They whipped me. I,
king and leader of my people.

(Pause)

I told them nothing.

(Pause)

But I'll not be silenced. No. I'll
raise my voice so that it will
carry as far as the mountains where
the gods dwell. They will remember,
even though men forget.

Spaniards, led by Cortés, gather silently round Cuauhtémoc.

CUAUHTÉMOC

I will make the hills sound with
our voice, the voice of the Mexica.
One day someone will hear and know
that we lived here and were great.
I will howl and howl until the echo
returns...

The Spaniards stab him from all sides. He falls and is kicked upstage.

OLMEDO

Exaudi nos, Domine sancte, Pater
omnitpotens, aeterne Deus;

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

OLMEDO (CONT'D)

et mittere digneris sanctum Angelum
tuum de caelis, qui custodiat,
foveat, protegat, visitet atque
defendat omnes habitantes in hoc
loco. Per Christum Dominum nostrum.

SPANIARDS

Amen.

Cortés glances at the golden calendar.

OLMEDO

Domine, exaudi orationem meam.

SPANIARDS

Et clamor meus ad te veniat.

OLMEDO

Dominus vobiscum.

SPANIARDS

Et cum spiritu tuo.

CORTÉS

Sandoval.

SANDOVAL

General?

CORTÉS

Have that thing melted down, will
you?

SANDOVAL

Sir.

Tecuichpo enters. She is pregnant. Cortés signals to her to join him. Together they watch while Sandoval has the the calendar cut down and carried away. The remaining Spaniards follow. Cuauhtémoc's body is left lying on stage, alone. Blind Ecatzin enters, feeling his way.

ECATZIN

No, no, no.

A priest can't live forever. It's
no secret. But while Cuauhtémoc
needs me, I swear I'll not die. A
fine, generous, noble king, he is.
They tell me he's here, that he's
sent for me. Cuauhtémoc? It's
Ecatzin, the priest. Who's that? Is
it you, lord? You don't answer.
Have I offended you? Forgive me.
I've been ill and am left in
darkness. Not that it matters. An
old man must expect infirmity. Such
silence.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

He stumbles across the body.

ECATZIN

What's this? A soldier sleeping on the job. The king won't like that. Wake up, wake up. You'll be in trouble. Come on now. He doesn't stir. He breathes peacefully enough. No harm in that.

(He feels along the body)

A king's insignia? How can this be? Thief. That's what you are. A thief asleep in my lord's clothing. Where a crime's been committed we must have justice. It's only right. But what is justice? Tell me that? You don't know? I'll tell you. It's the right of kings. There's a scar on my lord's forehead. He's had it since childhood. Nobody can steal that. I've known you since you were fresh in your mother's arms. You wouldn't remember. The young are free of memories; the old live by them. Tell me, how is your cousin Moctezuma? Is he well? I'm glad to hear it. He did his best you say? Is he at peace now?

(Calling)

Cuauhtémoc! Cuauhtémoc!

(Pause)

Hiding somewhere I fancy. He always did fool around. You sent for me, lord. I'm coming. A moment's rest, and I'll be with you.

He lies beside Cuauhtémoc. Faint light. We are back round the camp fire.

IXTLILXOCHITL

That was it. The end of living and the beginning of survival.

Someone mutters "the fire's gone out". The participants embrace in silence and part. Ixlilxochitl is the last to leave.

IXTLILXOCHITL (CONT'D)

Until next year then.

Blackout.