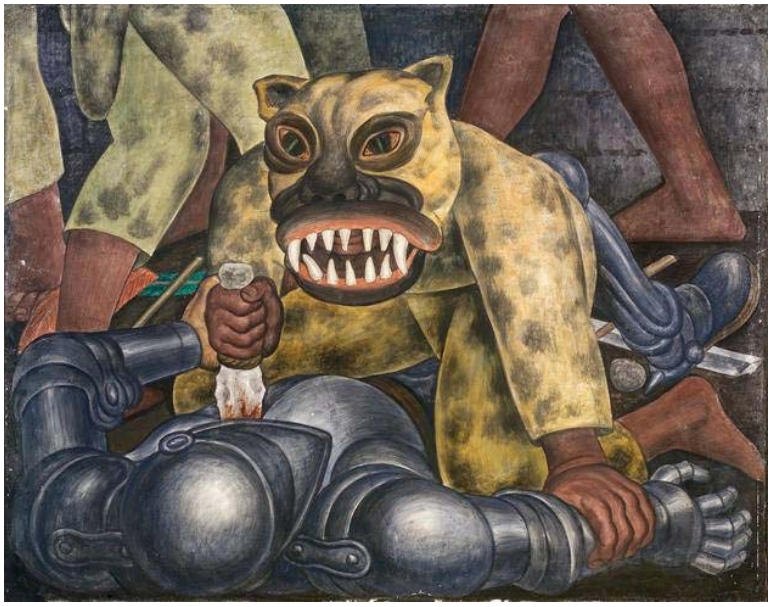


# SWORD OF CORTES

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*It is like a dream...*

An azure blue sea stretches out before us; calm, warm, beautiful.

In the distance, fire on water-- we almost think it's the setting of the sun.

Then, strange and ominous:

Humming birds fall from the sky-- a gentle scatter, then like rain-- sheets of them; a green and blue luminescence roiling on the ocean's surface.

WE RACE across the azure blue sea towards the fire on the horizon; WHERE 13 PORTUGUESE CARAVEL SHIPS BURN LIKE HELL.

*Year of our Lord: 1521*
*Somewhere off the Yucatan Peninsula*

**WE'RE UNDER WATER**

Churning and murky blue-- enormous ship's sails undulating and drifting past like ghosts-- the liquid SOUNDS of GROANING hulls and masts SNAPPING.

The bulk of a shadowy Caravel sinks past, just missing us as a SPANISH OFFICER fights his way to the surface; broadsword drifting to the sea floor.

**SWORD OF CORTES**

**EXT. SINKING SHIPS - DAY**

JUAN JARAMILLO (30), a Spanish officer, splashes up from the depths with a GASP-- terrified eyes. He watches a handful of SPANISH DECK HANDS row quickly towards land.

Surrounding him, the Caravels are engulfed in raging flames, CRACKLING FIRE, massive structures crashing into the sea.

Not another man in sight; save one:

Jaramillo's eyes lock on HERNAN CORTES (40) and desperately route for him as Cortes rushes across the deck of the last surviving ship--

--fearlessly torching the majestic sails and diving off the bow. He swims towards Jaramillo-- breathless-- wide eyed.

(CONTINUED)

And we're slowly becoming aware of a cacophony of SOUNDS; MEN SHOUTING, weapons CLASHING, horses SCREECHING, dogs BARKING and the BOOM-BOOM-BOOM of CANNON FIRE.

Jaramillo glances back as the last Caravel goes down with a HUSH and swims towards the distant:

**EXT. BEACH - VERACRUZ - DAY**

Bloody waves hit the shore-- it's QUIET. DEAD BODIES ebb and flow with the tide, mixing with a thousand dead Hummingbirds.

Vacant SPANISH DINGHIES (raised oars) line the beach.

Jaramillo staggers onto the red clotted sand as a MOUNTED CALVARY of 30 SPANIARDS lead their horses somberly through a silent battle ground.

Eyes like a hawk's-- Jaramillo assesses the bodies of DEAD TOBASCAN WARRIORS; faces painted with yellow and blue-- loincloths-- strange spears and clubs--

--then, the bodies of DEAD SPANISH; swords, muskets, dented breastplates.

Eyes darting now to SOLDIERS gathering; at least 200 tend another 50, wounded. Others sit on the sand, dazed, just relieved to be alive.

Moving through and: Snatching a broadsword from a DEAD MAN'S GRIP-- now focused on a rise with 12 silent CANNONS, MEN crowded around them.

Eyes moving to Cortes, mounting a large stallion-- riding quietly through the kill zone like a prince; soaking wet, bare feet.

Jaramillo coldly drives his stolen broadsword into a dying TOBASCAN-- then ANOTHER who's CRAWLING AWAY.

Suddenly, Cortes is riding flat out towards us-- SHOUTING UNHEARD WORDS--

--as an INJURED, BLOOD DRENCHED TOBASCAN stumbles to his feet; his Maquahuitl (part club/part sword) ARCING into Jaramillo's:

**SMASH CUT TO BLACK**

**EXT. OFFICER'S CAMP - VERACRUZ - FADING IN - DAY**

The SOUNDS of insects BUZZING and the VOICE OF CORTES fading in and out-- a SURGEON stitches Jaramillo's head wound together crudely. Jaramillo struggles to comprehend the words:

CORTES (O.S.)
If you want to take the island, you burn the ships.

Cortes has an audience of 20 CAPITANOS (Spanish officers) outside a war tent. RAGGED, WAR-SPENT SOLDIERS push in, listening-- gathering around CAPITANO 1:

CAPITANO 1
Governor Velasquez will come with a thousand of the king's men-- you had no right.

CORTES
I'm your Captain General.

CAPITANO 2
(at odds with Capitano 1)
It's his expedition-- his alone.

From the back of the crowd:

WAR-SPENT SOLDIER
They'll hang us all for high treason!

CORTES
(calls out)
There's no going back now.

CAPITANO 1
You plan to take Spain's land for yourself-- admit it!

A deep anger wipes across Cortes' face as CROSSTALK BREAKS OUT; SOLDIERS CALL OUT MUTINOUSLY AND CAPTAINS ARGUE.

Jaramillo brushes the surgeon aside and shakily stands, reaching for a nearby short sword, gripping it tight. But it's the million mile stare and soft spoken voice that stops them cold:

JARAMILLO
In the name of Christ, he's offering you the world.

As Cortes verbally defends himself in the background-- a flinty eyed, red headed captain, ALVARADO, WHISPERS to another, SAENZ, a rogue and experienced looking man.

Alvarado nods toward Jaramillo:

ALVARADO
I overheard him back in Cuba. Noble bastard told Cortes to use the fighting men to strip the land, then pay us a pittance.

Saenz eyes Jaramillo curiously:

SAENZ
Ah, the king's tactician. Why's he even here?

ALVARADO
Why would a wealthy Marques give his first born the best horses and weapons? Then send him to the edge of the world-- with Cortes.

Jaramillo has Alvarado at sword point in an instant.

JARAMILLO
You tell me.

ALVARADO
So he will never return.

Jaramillo broadsides Alvarado with the flat of his sword. Alvarado drops to his knees. Jarmillo tosses his sword aside and the fight is on. Soldiers ENCOURAGE it.

ALVARADO
Our way back-- our ships-- gone!

Cortes quickly steps in and kicks Alvarado hard in the gut. Alvarado struggles to breath; incapacitated.

CORTES
My ships, Alvarado.

Jaramillo stands down; SCOFFS.

CORTES
Enough.

Cortes faces the fired-up Soldiers; his calmness is chilling:

CORTES
Enough.

A SLOW SILENCE spreads and takes hold.

CORTES
Now, you all know me-- know that I don't make bold moves without reason.

Cortes quickly flips open a chest filled with gold trinkets smeared with fresh blood.

CORTES
You're all free to meet Velasquez when he arrives. You'll return to Spain without blemish. But you'll return without this--

Lifts a fist of bloody gold high.

CORTES
When I'm finished those who stay will be richer than the Almighty himself. Living in a land where no man bows down to another. And no man calls himself king.

Hope ripples through the Soldier's ranks in WHISPERS.

CORTES
And everyone knows-- a man without his own land and wealth is not man. He's a slave. Stand with me-- and I will make you Hidalgos. Every last one of you!

A moment, then:

CORTES
My word on it-- which when given, is gold.

Jaramillo points his sword right at Cortes-- it is a moving and noble gesture:

JARAMILLO
I stand with you, Hernan Cortes de Monroy y Pizarro.

A RANDOM SOLDIER emerges from within a knot of fighting men.

RANDOM SOLDIER
We stand with him, also.

ANOTHER tentatively CALLS OUT:

ANOTHER SOLDIER
As do I. And these men next to me.

TWO OFFICERS flanking him nod assent. Then ANOTHER OFFICER, and MORE SOLDIERS-- as a flood of UNITED VOICES RISE UP.

Jaramillo exhales-- glances to Cortes like a proud brother and heads towards the:

**EXT. MEDIC'S CAMP - VERACRUZ - DAY**

Facing a lineup of INJURED SOLDIERS, crude surgeries and suffering. Jaramillo takes his time, addressing each MAN he passes.

JARAMILLO
Well done--
(to the next)
--you fought bravely today.

He approaches a gnarled OLD SPANIARD, lying face down-- a bloody rag over his exposed buttocks.

JARMILLO
Carlos-- not you.

OLD SPANIARD
Just like the women in the king's court-- you can't turn your back on these savages.

Jaramillo lifts the rag, inspects a puncture wound; CHUCKLES:

JARAMILLO
Yes, I can see that.

OLD SPANIARD
At least the women in the king's court kiss a man before--

But Jaramillo's staring at a YOUNG SOLDIER who's legs have been amputated-- pale, near death. The Young Soldier CALLS OUT to him in a HUSH:

YOUNG SOLDIER
Captain--

Jaramillo kneels down, takes the Soldier's hand.

JARAMILLO
You're going home, Sebastian.

YOUNG SOLDIER
How, Sir?

Something flickers in Jaramillo's eyes; *no ships.*

JARAMILLO
You're a conquistador. Your name will be written in history. Your family--

The Soldier smiles and he's dead.

JARAMILLO
--will be proud of you.

Jaramillo sits a moment, then closes the Soldier's eyes.

**EXT. PALM GROVE - VERACRUZ - DAY**

A group of captive TOBASCAN WOMEN huddle, tied to palm trees; they sit quietly staring into the jungle.

One woman, MALI, is so exotically beautiful it's hard to look at her. Wrapped only in a serape, there's a wildness in her, alert, like a leopard watching prey.

She keenly watches Jaramillo walk toward the breaking waves; feral eyes. He's contemplative, head bowed.

In the distance FRANCISCAN PRIESTS perform Catholic Mass on the beach; hard bitten, FIGHTING MEN kneel solemnly.

*But Jaramillo is a man standing alone.*

Cortes approaches him just as Mali looks away. She does not see Cortes.

**EXT. BEACH - VERACRUZ - SUNSET**

Jaramillo studies the dead hummingbirds washing up against his bare feet. He takes in the vast wilderness surrounding him. And Cortes:

CORTES
No other would have stood by me.

Jaramillo cups a dead hummingbird in his palms.

JARMILLO
They don't understand. You're a powerful man, you'll convince them.

CORTES
Power's an odd thing. In itself it's just an illusion. In my case, that illusion can never be broken or my dream is over.

Jaramillo thoughtfully sets down the dead Hummingbird and takes in the oddness and carnage surrounding them.

JARAMILLO
A strange dream you're having, Hernan.

Cortes LAUGHS nervously.

CORTES
Maybe a nightmare. These people fight with a ferocity I've never seen before.

Jaramillo CHUCKLES.

JARAMILLO
Then when the king's men arrive to arrest you, surrender and live.

CORTES
I didn't come to plow a king's field. I came to build an empire. And you'll clear the way for it, won't you? Even it means cutting down men, women and children?

JARAMILLO
I don't give a damn about these indigenas. I came for gold.

Cortes back slaps him.

CORTES
That's why I love you-- your honesty-- and your complete lack of humanity.

They stroll the beach littered with DEAD TOBASCANS as the sun sinks into sea-- Jarmillo barefoot in the waves.

JARMILLO
I need to make sure I survive your antics-- you almost got me killed today.

CORTES
I knew you were a good swimmer.

**INT. MONCTEZUMA'S PALACE - TENOCHTITLAN - NIGHT**

A barefoot AZTEC SERVANT rushes down smooth marble halls filled with fragrant flowers, rich jade frescos and TINKLING FOUNTAINS.

Exotic birds, illuminated in the torchlight, sit on open air window sills. The evening breeze ruffles their feathers; a riot of color.

The Servant carries a basket and scrolls.

**IN THE CHAMBER OF THRONES**

Monctezuma, king of the Aztecs, sits upon a great daise; feathered headdress, jade earrings and nose ornament. Though he is now elderly, his eyes are sharp and alert and imposing.

He smiles at a CHILD sitting at his feet as he repairs a tiny, wooden toy with great concentration.

The Servant approaches on hands and knees with scrolls and basket-- places them at Monctezuma's feet, peels back the lid.

*It's filled with dead hummingbirds.*

Monctezuma is contemplative. He peruses the scrolls; sketches of horses, dogs and the Spanish army. He rises regally.

PULL OUT TO REVEAL: The room is filled with MANY YOUNG WIVES and CHILDREN dressed in colorful serapes and stunning gold jewelry.

Without a word, Monctezuma kisses his many Young Wives respectfully and touches the heads of his many Children tenderly.

ATTENDANTS who never look him in the eye, gently scatter a trail of raw cotton before each step he takes, so his bare feet will not touch the ground. It is a patient and reverent act. Monctezuma exits into--

**EXT. TEMPLE OF THE SUN AND THE RAIN - TENOCHTITLAN - NIGHT**

--another world. The CHEERING of THOUSANDS SLAMS into us. PRIESTS in bloody smocks, hair knotted with human viscera and six inch fingernails greet Monctezuma with reverence.

Monctezuma approaches a drugged, yet awake, sacrificial VICTIM who is arched backwards over a stone pedestal.

Without missing a beat he vigorously opens the abdomen with an obsidian knife-- reaches IN AND UP to his elbows and PULLS OUT the beating heart with his bare hands--

--lifts it up to the starry sky as the CROWD goes ecstatic.

PULL OUT TO REVEAL: Hundreds of drugged WAR CAPTIVES awaiting their turn on the top of an enormous blue and red, step pyramid.

**EXT. CAMP - VERACRUZ - NIGHT**

We follow Cortes as he cuts through stunning organization; we're in a camp of frenzied activity composed of 600 men:

BLACKSMITHS repair weaponry and shoe horses. War dogs are fed; Cortes pats the head of ONE. The dead are buried; Cortes makes the sign of the cross and a caravan is taking shape for expedition.

Cortes inspects the crates and general supplies; SQUEALING PIGS and CLUCKING CHICKENS.

He arrives at the equine corral and runs a hand over his stallion's flank fondly. Standing amidst the majestic horses, he turns in a slow circle-- surveying his dream.

PULL UP TO A BIRD'S EYE VIEW: A crude fort of newly spiked wooden boundaries encircles an enormous area; Cortes, under the stars, appearing small and insignificant within it.

He spreads his arms wide as if embracing the world, closes his eyes and breathes it all in.

**EXT. WAR TENT - VERACRUZ - NIGHT**

Dry clothes and boots, a stern Jaramillo strides towards FATHER AGUILAR; a ragged, bone thin man, squatting amongst the women captives. Jaramillo motions he join him at the tent's campfire.

JARAMILLO
You're Aguilar?

FATHER AGUILAR
Father-- Aguilar.

He opens a leather binder; prepares to take notes.

JARAMILLO
I hear you speak the local language. You were shipwrecked?

Father Aguilar glares at him.

FATHER AGUILAR
I've been a slave for eight years. When I saw you, I thought I'd see Spain again-- but you burned your ships.

JARAMILLO
Forget about Spain. What do you know of a city of gold?

FATHER AGUILAR
Why should I help you? Your kind's as brutal as these savages.

JARAMILLO
Because you're now a free man without an owner to feed you.

FATHER AGUILAR
I want to return to Spain.

JARAMILLO
No one goes anywhere until I get what I came for.

Cortes strides towards them:

CORTES
He came for gold. Unless you give him what he wants-- we'll be here all night.

Cortes reaches a hand out.

CORTES
Hernan Cortes. You're my interpreter?

Father ignores the gesture.

FATHER AGUILAR
By now every man, woman and child for miles knows that you're here. Conquest won't sit well in the Ma'ya'ab. They've had enough from their own Huey Tlatoani and-- that other one-- Cordoba.

Cortes rips a leg of roast pig from the spit; savoring it. Father watches, skinny ribbed, he can almost taste the meat.

CORTES
Cordoba didn't understand something. He didn't understand the power of bartering.

Father Aguilar watches Cortes eat; he's starving.

FATHER AGUILAR
Get me back to Spain and I'll translate for you.

CORTES
I'll do better, I'll feed you in the mean time.

Cortes gives Father a choice cut of meat. Glances to Jaramillo with a 'that's how it's done.' Jaramillo CHUCKLES and strides towards the sleeping women, tossing them a share.

Father stands abruptly to bless the meat.

FATHER AGUILAR
Bénedic, Dómine, nos et haec, tua dona quae--

Jaramillo returns to the fire and interrupts:

JARAMILLO
--you'll answer my question now.

FATHER AGUILAR
Are you not a man of God, Sir? Because if you're not, you'll never survive this place.

Jaramillo meets eyes with Cortes:

JARAMILLO
(quips)
I'll return to Spain when Captain General Cortes is arrested. But for now-- I'll obey orders under penalty of execution.

Cortes CHUCKLES as he allows Father to bless his person; head bowed, then rises, clearly exhausted.

CORTES
Juan-- brief me in a few hours.

Cortes enters his war tent as Jarmillo glares at Father Alvarado.

JARAMILLO
You'll answer my question now.

Father eats his meat, doesn't say a word; Jaramillo can't take it.

JARAMILLO
I'm talking to you.

Alvarado arrives, breaking the moment, and gathers the captive women.

ALVARADO
Get up. The men need you.

Father stands quickly as Alvarado pushes Mali forward:

FATHER AGUILAR
Not her! She has Cordoba's disease.

Alvarado's red haired complexion goes a deeper shade; distinctly repulsed, he subconsciously cups his crotch.

JARAMILLO
For god's sakes, just leave her.

Alvarado leads the women away; Mali remains.

JARAMILLO
Why did you lie to my officer?

Jaramillo opens a bottle of Spanish wine, leans back-- stares at Father Aguilar as if 'reading' him. Father glares at him.

JARAMILLO
Alright Father, I'm done.

Jaramillo pours wine into a tin cup; offers it. Father's touched by the noble gesture.

FATHER AGUILAR
You're a very circumspect man to simply covet gold.

Jaramillo scoffs-- glances to the tent:

JARAMILLO
You mean, why am I not here to do something noble-- like baptize savages or build an empire?

FATHER AGUILAR
You're clearly a nobleman. Why resort to the violent life of a conquistador?

Jaramillo drinks straight from the bottle.

FATHER AGUILAR
You have no wife nor friends, do you? What of your family?

Jaramillo follows Father Aguilar's line of sight; his sword is caked with dried blood.

FATHER AGUILAR
And I take it you're not the praying kind.

JARAMILLO
What would I pray for? A new halberd?

Father Aguilar takes deep draught of wine.

FATHER AGUILAR
If I were you, I'd pray for someone like her.

Nods to Mali.

JARAMILLO
If she knows of the city of gold-- I might consider it.

FATHER AGUILAR
I give you gold, you return me to Spain. Her name is Mali, ask her about it.

JARAMILLO
I'm asking you. You speak Spanish.

FATHER AGUILAR
I can't help you.

Then:

MALI
(in Castilian Spanish)
I know of Tenochtitlan. But you'll never make it past the Tlaxcalans.

Jaramillo whips back in a hammer-shock of disbelief; Mali stares at him.

JARAMILLO
Good Christ.
(a beat)
Hernan-- come out here!

Cortes emerges from his tent, disheveled as if just awakened. Mali cannot take her eyes off Cortes; she's stunned by his presence.

JARAMILLO
Tell him-- tell him of the city of gold. What is their military like? How many are they?

CORTES
Let her speak, man.

Mali rises to her feet-- slow and even-- eyes glued firmly on Cortes, slinking closer and squatting down:

MALI
First-- you must face the Tlaxcalans. They're known to us as the farm of Monctezuma Xocoyotzin, Lord of the Azteca.

She draws a map in the soft dirt with a finger tip.

MALI
He allows them autonomy-- so he can raid them during the flower wars.

She drags a finger to identify "here" to "there."

MALI
Each year, he takes ten thousand.
(meets eyes with Cortes)
Their blood feeds his gods.
His warriors come as ghosts.

Her finger traces a large circle around the Tlaxcalan village's location.

MALI
The Tlaxcalans are fierce fighters because of it-- and there are many.

JARAMILLO
You know how to reach this city of gold?

Her finger draws a line to the west, angrily.

MALI
I know where all my enemies live.

Again, her eyes move to Cortes-- a question in them.

**EXT. MONCTEZUMA'S PALACE - TENOCHTITLAN - NIGHT**

CUAUHTEMOC, a strong warrior, frees the eagle perched on his forearm. It flies to the balcony and SCREECHES.

He cautiously walks towards it and looks up to the night sky. Monctezuma silently comes to stand with him; a father and his son. The elder lays a hand on the younger's shoulder.

*They are both seeing and sensing something profound.*

PULL OUT TO REVEAL: A COMET grows larger in the clear, starry heavens; unmoving, tail brightly lit.

FROM BELOW: An OLD WOMAN'S HORRIBLE WAILING--

WAILING WOMAN
My children! My children, you must flee the city!

--and everywhere in the city PEOPLE gaze upwards in fear.

Monctezuma's eyes narrow; Cuauhtemoc goes to his knees.

**EXT. WAR TENT - VERACRUZ - NIGHT**

Jaramillo is slumped over and barely awake. Cortes stares at the comet.

CORTES
Someday I'll build my estancia right here. Villa de Rica de la Veracruz.

JARAMILLO
No more dreaming.

Cortes CHUCKLES to himself.

CORTES
Easy for you to say.

JARAMILLO
Because I am always awake.

CORTES
You should have seen that Priest when I told him he'd not be returning to Spain anytime soon.

But Jaramillo is already asleep. Mali, chained to a nearby tree, calls out to Cortes quietly:

MALI
I know who you are.

He SCOFFS, then turns away.

MALI
You bring much death to create new life. You can trust me. I'll keep your secret.

Cortes tries to ignore her.

MALI
You return to claim your lands. It's a one reed year, the return of Quetzacoatl is prophesied. A white skinned god who comes from the sea? I know who you are.

She points to the comet.

MALI
It announces your arrival. Not many know this, but I do. I'm Mayan and I'm royal. I know you.

She waits for his reaction; his admission. He goes to her; squats down-- almost laughs.

CORTES
I'm the Captain General.

MALI
Maybe your journey through the dark rift of dreams was difficult and you wake without memory-- are you certain you're not the god?

Now he does laugh.

CORTES
Fairly certain, yes.

Disappointment wipes across her features.

MALI
Spaniard.

Then, a pleading WHISPER:

MALI
Let me help you. I know many things. I saw Cordoba. I saw his horses and dogs. I know what you can do.

CORTES
You're already going to help me. You'll lead me to Tenochtitlan.

Mali's eyes narrow.

MALI
I speak twenty two dialects. I can take you to many places of gold if you end Monctezuma's reign.

An amused beat.

CORTES
You want revenge.

MALI
I've had nothing else to think on for half my life.

CORTES
What of Father Aguilar? He understands that negotiating is preferable to warfare. He's Spanish.
(a beat)
And he can be trusted--

Something catches his eye in the darkness. Ahead, a shadowy form swings from a tree. *Father Aguilar has hanged himself.*

Cortes walks away from her without a word, checks Father for life. SWEARS UNDER HIS BREATH, cuts Father Aguilar down; carries him past her.

MALI
Now what do you say to me, Captain General?

Stops in his tracks.

CORTES
What do I say? I say I'm going to bury this man. Then, I'm going to sleep.

**EXT. VERACRUZ - DAY**

Jaramillo, mounted and ready, glances up to the noon day sun then focuses on:

A Catholic cross and city marker erected for: VERACRUZ. At it, Cortes PRAYS on bent knee then mounts his stallion.

A caravan of 300 men, horses, dogs and carts carrying cannons and supplies, slowly moves out. A large travel wagon pulled by draft horses rumbles forward within the line up.

**INT. CORTES' WAGON - IN MOTION - DAY**

Mali is seated with blankets, books, maps and Cortes' clothing, armor and personal weapons. Much like a travel home there is a bed, a table-desk and lanterns. She peeks out the large open air window.

**EXT. VERACRUZ - DAY**

Jaramillo cantors his horse to Cortes. Cortes, atop his stallion, leans down to pass schematics to LITTLE JOHN VELASQUEZ outside the camp entrance:

CORTES
Complete the fortifications as soon as possible.

LITTLE JOHN
Thank you for your faith in me, Captain General.

JARAMILLO
If Governor Velasquez' ships are seen on the horizon-- send trackers with a message. I'll be marking our route.

Little John WHISPERS to Jaramillo:

LITTLE JOHN
You burned fourteen of my uncle's ships.

JARAMILLO
We burned the king's ships.

LITTLE JOHN
It is the same.

Jaramillo tosses Little John a gold trinket.

JARAMILLO
Tell your uncle the Governor we'll give him enough of that to fill a thousand chests. Expect the first shipment within the month.

CORTES
And ten thousand more for that arm chair king of his. I chose you for a reason, Velasquez.

LITTLE JOHN
And what was that Sir?

Cortes and Jaramillo exchange a look.

JARAMILLO
To convince him he wants a part of this-- use-the-gold-to-buy his participation.

LITTLE JOHN
Yes, Sir!

Cortes and Jaramillo kick their horses into a cantor and join the caravan as it leaves Veracruz. Cortes gallops ahead as: 300 remaining SOLDIERS CHEER. Cortes salutes warmly. Jarmillo rides ahead stoically.

**EXT. RAIN FOREST ROAD - WAGON - FOLLOWING**

The BUZZ of insects and the heaviness of inland humidity. An ancient earthen road cuts through jungle; more of a game trail. Jaramillo, sweating with the heat, rides towards the wagon; sidles up to it.

JARAMILLO
There's a leather bound book inside (motions size) yay big. Pass it to me.

A hummingbird BUZZES Jaramillo; he brushes it away.

MALI
It carries the soul of a warrior from the house of Huitzilopochtli-- the left handed hummingbird. It's trying to speak with you.

We can almost read his mind: *She's witless.*

MALI
It brings a warning.

He smiles politely.

JARMILLO
Bird's don't speak Spanish. Nor do they have souls.

We can almost read her mind: *He's witless.*

JARAMILLO
My journal-- it's inside next to the Captain General's tack.

Mali passes the leather binder through the window, Jaramillo drops his reins and reads as he rides.

MALI
What do you read?

JARAMILLO
You will learn to address me with my title-- Captain Jaramillo.

MALI
You are noble. I am royal. My father didn't serve a K'niche, he was one.

Jaramillo doesn't even look up.

MALI
What do you read?

He can feel her staring at him.

JARAMILLO
Battle strategy for the Tlaxcalans.

MALI
You have a strategy for people who fight like animals?

JARAMILLO
I'm chief strategist. It's my occupation.

And still, he never looks up.

MALI
I would try to trap the animal, not fight it.

JARAMILLO
This isn't a hunting expedition--

MALI
(shrugs)
--you'll stand in a line like Cordoba and they'll send just enough warriors until you run out of lead. They'll outnumber you twenty to one. And they'll charge you-- you should just trap them like animals.

Jaramillo glances up, stares at her for a stern beat, then half spins his horse back and rides towards Cortes.

**EXT. RAIN FOREST ROAD - DAY**

The caravan comes to a halt. Jaramillo and Cortes cantor their horses along side it, stopping to direct officers near the cannon carts, pointing to the infantry column, then speaking with Alvarado intensely.

**EXT. HOUSE OF THE EAGLES - TENOCHTITLAN - DAY**

Monctezuma and Cuauhtemoc quietly watch it. The PRIEST points to it.

PRIEST
(in Nahuatl)
It's a one reed year. The return of Quetzacoatl is prophesied.

An eagle does battle with a rattlesnake at the end of a long gallery, tied to a pedestal. The rattle snake slowly coils around the eagles neck, instead of striking-- it's choking it to death.

MONCTEZUMA
(in Nahuatl)
Who is the eagle-- and who is the snake?

Cuauhtemoc snap catches the snake in a fist; saves the eagle.

CUAUHTEMOC
(in Nahuatl)
Father- it doesn't matter-- we hold the blood of gods within our veins. Eagle or snake, what's ours by divine right can never be taken from us. I will face this god as an equal.

The Priest GASPS. Monctezuma smiles.

MONCTEZUMA
(in Nahuatl)
Careful, Cuauhtemoc, the brave die first.

Cuauhtemoc tosses the snake into a pit filled with writhing rattlers.

CUAUHTEMOC
(in Nahuatl)
In dreams we live forever. Fear is the only weapon which kills before battle is waged.

MONCTEZUMA
(in Nahuatl)
Ah, you've become wise in your short years.

Cuauhtemoc meets his gaze evenly; a hint of a smile.

CUAUHTEMOC
(in Nahuatl)
My teacher is wise.

**EXT. TLAXCALAN VILLAGE - DAY**

10 INFANTRYMEN stand in formation. Cortes sits atop his stallion. Mali and Jaramillo, unarmed, on foot, face a Tlaxcalan CACIQUE surrounded by 100 WARRIORS armed with knives, bows, maces, spears and lances.

It's tense as the Cacique inspects Cortes' stallion nervously.

CORTES
We are enemies of Monctezuma.

MALI
(translates in Nahuatl)

The Cacique's eyes narrow.

JARAMILLO
We need gold.

MALI
(translates in Nahuatl)

The Cacique is perplexed; he ANSWERS.

MALI
He wants to know why you want the excrement of the gods.

JARAMILLO
Excrem--? The soldiers in our army have a disease-- only gold can cure it.

MALI
(translates in Nahuatl)

The Cacique removes his thin, gold necklace and offers it.

JARAMILLO
Does he have more?

CORTES
Tell him we'll trade.

MALI
(translates in Nahuatl)

Cortes offers the Cacique a string of glass beads. The Cacique is pleased.

CORTES
Give him this too.

Cortes leans down with a Spanish mirror. Mali sees it, tries to snatch it--

MALI
No!

--the Cacique reaches for it, sees his image--

MALI
(to Cortes)
Fool! Smoking mirror--- the trickster!

--Mali pushes Jaramillo back as the Cacique lunges SMASHING his Maquahitl (deadly mace with ball at the end) into Cortes' stallion; it rears violently. Cortes rolls off.

A MUSKET SHOT FIRES from the jungle, a glimpse of Alvarado-- his bullet wings the Cacique.

Confused Tlaxcalans hesitate, then as if realizing they're sitting ducks-- SHOUT OUT and all hell breaks loose.

Jaramillo holds off Tlaxcalans as Cortes desperately tries to retrieve muskets from his rearing stallion; fails.

MULTIPLE SPANISH MUSKET SHOTS ERUPT from a hidden jungle lineup as: A wild eyed TLAXCALAN chases Mali, throwing her to the ground. She wriggles out of his grasp, escapes into the jungle. The Tlaxcalan goes after her.

Jaramillo pursues, CALLING OUT--

JARAMILLO
(to soldiers)
Get the woman! We can't lose the woman!

--Cortes' stallion bolts wildly past, arrows ZING through the air, MUSKET FIRE everywhere--

*No one's listening.*

--Jaramillo leaps onto a galloping horse and takes off into the jungle.

Cortes grabs two muskets from dead SOLDIERS; FIRES a two hander into the air-- signaling: The CALVARY races out from the jungle taking a two sided approach becoming one whirling circle of dust surrounding the battle.

Wide Mouthed Mastiffs FOLLOW, war dogs, rushing into the fray, tearing at half naked Tlaxcalans.

*These people have never seen dogs or horses.*

Trapped within the rotating motion of the Calvary, the frantic Tlaxcalans reduce to a tight cluster, surrendering, bowing down. Then, nothing but the SOUND of GROWLING DOGS and Tlaxcalan CRIES.

**EXT. TLAXCALAN JUNGLE - DAY**

CRASHING through thick overgrowth:

JARAMILLO
Mali!

Under a tree is the once wild eyed Tlaxcalan warrior who had pursued Mali, now dead, head SMASHED-- he's missing a finger.

Jaramillo dismounts his horse, squats down; studies the oddity. Then, movement from a depth of focus:

MALI (O.S.)
Captain Jaramillo--

Mali emerges from the jungle, half naked, nothing but a loincloth-- MANY severed, human fingers tied to it like trophies. She tosses an Atlatls aside (a stick with hook and dart.)

Jaramillo stares at her a long beat:

JARAMILLO
Gra--gratitude Senorita. I'm alive because of you.

She turns her back, removes the loincloth and string of fingers. Ties the cloth as a serape, covering herself. Hangs the war string reverently on a branch.

MALI
You're alive because I need you alive.

Jaramillo's eyes narrow *(strange woman)* but he simply takes her by the arm and leads her out.

**EXT. TLAXCALAN VILLAGE - DAY**

Cortes rides a calvary horse down a lineup of defeated Tlaxcalans encircled by his Infantrymen.

CORTES
Fools. It was a mirror!

Jaramillo and Mali approach as: IN THE DISTANCE, SHOUTING and a RIDER coming in fast. Jaramillo turns away; *he knows.*

Cortes tenses:

CORTES
It's one of John's trackers.

The Rider skids in-- travel worn.

RIDER
Captain General-- news from Veracruz. The Governor's ships have arrived.

Jaramillo pulls Cortes aside:

JARMILLO
We need to make good that promise to Velasquez. And we need to do it now.

Cortes' nervous eyes pan the Tlaxcalan line up.

CORTES
There's no gold.

JARMILLO
They're six days away. We don't have the man power to sack Tenochtitlan before they arrive. Nor to defend ourselves if they do.

CORTES
You think they'll dispatch from Veracruz?

JARMILLO
Would you let a man like Hernan Cortes run rough shod for long? When you believe he could turn Indigenas into soldiers within weeks?

CORTES
We don't have weeks.
(peruses the meager line of Tlaxcalans)
We don't have Indigenas.

Curious, Mali approaches; Jaramillo pulls her in.

JARAMILLO
We need to find gold quickly. Where can we find it outside of Tenochtitlan?

Mali surveys her surroundings.

MALI
Cholulans. A conquered people, in subjugation to Monctezuma. The gold is not theirs, they only craft it. So, they will not fight you.

CORTES
How far?

MALI
A day.

JARAMILLO
--and you just now share this knowledge with us?

MALI
I'm not seeking gold. You are.

Cortes strides back to the Veracruz Rider.

CORTES
Send word gold's arriving in one week's time. Take your rest-- head out before nightfall. Ride hard.

Cortes passes a gold trinket up to him.

RIDER
I'll do my best, Sir.

CORTES
Good man.

The Rider leaves. Cortes EXHALES and turns to face the injured Cacique:

CORTES
Tell this fool-- we won't execute them, if he and his warriors join us.

MALI
If you hadn't given him a mirror with the image of a dark god-- they wouldn't have attacked you.

CORTES
(fiercely focused)
Speak my words.

MALI
(translates in Nahuatl)

The Cacique RESPONDS.

MALI
He asks you allow him to send out runners to bring other Caciques, to tie the reeds with you.

CORTES
Tie the reeds?

MALI
Make an agreement.

JARAMILLO
No, no runners. Tell him no one's coming to save him.

MALI
(translates in Nahuatl)

Cacique RESPONDS, insulted.

MALI
He says you have beaten him fairly and finds you think too much. He does not respect your ignorance.

CORTES
He has no fear?

MALI
They fear only gods. To them, life is a dream and we're all nothing but figments.

Cortes turns to Jaramillo but speaks to Mali:

CORTES
Tell him to swear an oath-- or I hang him-- as an example.

MALI
(translates in Nahuatl)

The Cacique bows-- touches his finger to the dirt, then to his mouth.

MALI
May you eat dirt.

Cortes' eyes flash fire.

MALI
You misunderstand--

The Cacique cuts himself and presents his blood to Cortes in a tiny stem; a straw. He motions Cortes taste it.

CORTES
Hang him. Search the village for anything viable.

MALI
No--

CORTES
--I don't have time for this nonsense!

Unaware of the verdict, the perplexed Cacique turns his back on Cortes, offers the bloody straw to Jaramillo. Mali desperately WHISPERS:

MALI
Take it-- please.
(off his expression)
You don't understand this place-- I do-- take it.

Something in her plea pushes a tentative trust into Jaramillo. He reluctantly touches the ground, brings his finger to his lips and accepts the tiny straw. With great control he tastes the blood.

With that, the satisfied Cacique SPEAKS.

MALI
He will give you 25,000 warriors. Tonight, other Caciques will arrive and they will tie the reeds.

The Cacique sternly limps towards the village.

CORTES
25,000?

MALI
Yes.

CORTES
In the name of God--?

MALI
You have your army.
(to Jaramillo)
And your gold.

Cortes back slaps Jaramillo-- turns to Mali and presents her to the Soldiers surrounding the Tlaxcalan prisoners.

CORTES
We have victory-- and twenty five thousand men to fight at our sides.

Soldiers CHEER; fist pumping. Jaramillo, caught up in the moment, lifts Mali on his shoulders to MORE CHEERING.

CORTES
(to infantrymen)
Release them.

Tlaxcalans are released and for the first time we see Mali smile; it is like the sun itself.

**EXT. TLAXCALAN COURTYARD - NIGHT**

A Tlaxcalan celebration within an open courtyard; deer roast on spits garnished with quail, fruit and edible flowers.

SOLDIERS taste flowers, mystified, and mingle with TLAXCALANS like old friends as: BARE BREASTED WOMEN DANCE to drums and wood flutes-- Soldiers and Alvarado can't take their eyes off them.

**AT THE HEAD TABLE**

Sitting with the Cacique's ENTOURAGE and Jaramillo, Cortes speaks head to head with Mali. The table is low; they sit on cotton pillows upon a woven, matt covered, dirt floor.

CORTES
So these Cholulans will go easily?

MALI
They're a peaceful people.

CORTES
And this myth you speak of, the god Quetzacoatl. It interests me.

MALI
It's no myth. It's prophecy.

CORTES
I'm an educated man. I can assure you, it's a myth.

MALI
He brought great knowledge-- then sailed away promising to return.

CORTES
He came from the East. And he looked like me.

MALI
Yes.

Cortes leans in-- elbows Jaramillo-- *listen up.*

MALI
If you were able to meet Monctezuma before Quetzacoatl's arrival and convince him you're the god-- you could take the entire city with no bloodshed.

JARAMILLO
Did these Tlaxcalans believe in this prophecy?

She shakes her head as if-- again-- *he's witless.*

MALI
They saw you bleed. The important part is not to fight and bleed-- then convince them you're a god.

CORTES
The Cholulans, do they believe the myth?

MALI
(coy to Cortes)
They would see you as a god. Why not? You are god-like in many ways.

CORTES
Discuss this further with Captain Jaramillo. He prepares to meet them tomorrow.

JARAMILLO
(chuckles)
Which part? Battle strategy or how god-like you are?

Cortes LAUGHS, then slides a Tobascan bracelet from his pocket and takes Mali's hand into his--

CORTES
I took this from your oppressors. I reward those loyal to me and I believe you are loyal.

--clasps the bracelet on her wrist; kisses it seductively. Jaramillo shifts uncomfortably, then quietly strolls into the festivities. Cortes touches a strand of Mali's hair:

CORTES
If I wasn't subject to the laws of scripture-- and governor Velasquez wasn't my wife's brother-- I would mix my Spanish blood with your royal line. What a dynasty that would be.

MALI
You have laws about men and women?

CORTES
Our commandments don't allow for more than one wife.

She thinks about this oddity:

MALI
A man as powerful as you, could care for many wives.

He LAUGHS.

CORTES
Ah Mali, you are tempt me with your innocence.
(leans in)
Would you-- want to bare a Spanish child?

MALI
No one should ever bring new life into this bloody world.

*This woman is surprising.*

CORTES
Yes-- I'd like to change that. I have hope, Mali, that this new world will not be a bloody one.

He kisses her hand and strolls towards:

CENTER COURTYARD: A TLAXCALAN WARRIOR faces off with Jaramillo-- both sit cross legged on the ground and drink from small cups-- a ceramic bowl of fermenting cactus pads between them; Octli (100 proof.)

TLAXCALANS and SOLDIERS CLAP rhythmically CHEERING them on.

Then, SOMEONE removes the Octli bowl, carefully releasing a rattle snake between them-- it coils and SHAKE-RATTLES as:

A JADE FIGURINE is tossed in by the LAUGHING Cacique.

Jaramillo's now clearly intoxicated; the Octli hitting him hard and fast. The Tlaxcalan Warrior reaches carefully, dangerously for the figurine.

The snake targets-strikes-misses. The Warrior pulls back as if saying "your turn." Jaramillo takes a breath-- eyes his opponent and smiles. Then kicks out with a booted foot!

THE SNAKE'S fangs embed into worn leather. Jaramillo snatches the jade figurine to wild APPLAUSE-- shakes the snake off, stands for a drunken bow and salutes the baffled Tlaxcalan Warrior--

--then tosses the figurine back to him. As is customary, the Warrior embraces Jaramillo. Jaramillo tolerates it. Cortes meets Jaramillo with a back slap.

CORTES
Well done.

Cortes offers Jaramillo a cup; they toast/drink:

CORTES
If today's a sign of what's to come, the world is ours. The woman did well.

JARAMILLO
Who said-- give me a lever, a place to stand and I will move the Earth?

CORTES
She is our lever, indeed. She has much in common with us.

The Cacique, surrounded by ATTENDANTS, waves to Cortes to join him:

CORTES
We'll speak later. I've asked Mali to consult with you directly from now on.

Jaramillo almost chokes on his Octli drink.

CORTES
Warfare, how they fight, how they think, how far they'll go.

Cortes downs his Octli and motions Mali over to Jaramillo, then strides confidently towards the Cacique.

Mali leads Jaramillo to a quiet corner-- lays him flat on his back to gaze up to the starry sky. Side by side, she points to the comet:

MALI
That strange star announces the return of the god.

Jaramillo stares drunkenly at it.

JARAMILLO
Does he know Cortes got here first?

MALI
My idea is simple. Walk into Tenochtitlan while thousands of Tlaxcalans and Spanish lay in wait. Have the Captain General announce he's the god to Monctezuma's priests. They'll be expecting something like this, because of that star.

JARAMILLO
This is your plan?

MALI
Do you find fault with it?

JARAMILLO
(chuckles)
Hernan's convictions would never allow him to impersonate a heathen god. And there's no way I'd just stroll into a hostile city.

MALI
You think me a heathen?

JARAMILLO
No-- yes.
(scoffs in afterthought)
How would we announce ourselves? By way of one of those talking birds?
(a beat)
This isn't a good idea.

MALI
Why not? If it justifies the end of suffering?

JARAMILLO
Who's suffering? Let's be clear-- neither the Captain General nor I, are here to emancipate anyone. We're here to conquer. You know what that means?

MALI
Monctezuma will drop to his knees in supplication. Then, you can take his gold, his life and enslave them all.

Jaramillo YAWNS-- closing his eyes-- his mind spinning.

JARAMILLO
What was in that drink, woman?

**IN THE JUNGLE OUTSIDE THE VILLAGE**

TWO AZTEC GHOST WARRIORS (special forces of the Indigenous) watch from deep jungle-- ash covered bodies draped with vines. All we see are their eyes; stunning camouflaging.

POV GHOST WARRIORS: A WOUNDED SOLDIER is tended by a TLAXCALAN WOMAN; she sucks his bloody chest wound clean and bandages it. The Soldier doesn't know whether to be pleased or horrified.

Nearby-- Cortes' prize stallion is shackled for grazing; the Ghost Warriors note it with awed WHISPERING.

**INT. TLAXCALAN COURTYARD - NIGHT**

Jaramillo's eyes snap open-- he stares up to the sky a moment, then rolls to face Mali.

JARAMILLO
Are we in their territory now?

MALI
Yes.

JARAMILLO
Do you think this is why they haven't attacked us? They suspect us gods?

MALI
I'm certain of it.

He pinches the bridge of his nose; exasperated.

JARAMILLO
Then-- I must consider it.

She stares at him; he looks away-- disconcerted by her beauty.

MALI
I haven't thanked you yet.

JARAMILLO
For what?

MALI
Giving me my life back.

JARAMILLO
(scoffs)
No one's ever said 'that' to me before.
(off her expression)
I'm the one they hire to take it. You're one of the lucky ones.

She stands abruptly; he gently urges her back down.

JARAMILLO
(chuckles)
That wasn't well done of me. I apologize.

MALI
Why do you hide like that?

JARAMILLO
Hide?

MALI
With your words. Are you afraid if you show yourself, you'll become a soft spot for a dagger?
(off his expression)
Strong warriors are afraid of nothing-- especially of showing themselves with something as harmless as words.
(a beat)
You're afraid. I see it in your eyes.

Jaramillo thinks a moment, then-- *the hell with it.* He slides a child's golden chain and crucifix from a pocket near his heart-- no pretense-- just drunken honesty:

JARAMILLO
Not afraid, guilt ridden. I'm noble and I murder men, women and children for pay. It is the least noble thing a man of my title can do.

MALI
Then do not do it.

JARAMILLO
My father inherited his wealth. There was little left when I came of age. We couldn't pay our taxes. So one night, I challenged the king in a game of whisk-- double or nothing. What I didn't know was my father had borrowed from the Viceroy of Seville. We lost everything. Gold will buy there--

MALI
--love?

JARAMILLO
Respect.

MALI
If you don't have their love now. They don't deserve it when you repay them.

She places her hand on his heart.

MALI
No one died.

He studies the child's crucifix, tries to find the words:

JARAMILLO
I'll never forget the look of pure selflessness in my brother's eyes. He said, give this to the king and then you won't have to leave.

MALI
You took it?

JARAMILLO
It was sent to me months later in Cuba.

Surprised by his emotions, Jaramillo brushes the sting from his eyes.

JARAMILLO
My brother died of fever without a physician to tend him. He was six years old.

Mali is stunned.

MALI
I'm-- sorry-- I was wrong--

JARAMILLO
--now you.

She swallows-- reluctant.

MALI
Me?

JARAMILLO
Are you afraid of just-- harmless words?

She stares him down.

MALI
They beat my father to death as we watched.

**MALI'S FLASHBACK - MAYAN ROYAL PALACE - DAY**

Aztec WARRIORS kick a DEAD MAYAN K'NICHE'S BODY aside and lead his WIFE and ATTENDANTS out the door. A wide eyed TEN YEAR OLD MALI shivers in terror.

THROUGH THE DOOR: A view of the execution; throat slitting.

Young Mali CRIES OUT as she listens to everyone she's ever loved, choke on their own blood.

MALI (V.O.)
They made a gift of me to their allies. The people you killed on that beach.

A horrific AZTEC PRIEST, hair matted with human viscera, enters and carries Mali out.

**EXT. TLAXCALAN COURTYARD - NIGHT**

Jaramillo wipes the tears from Mali's face; she's as surprised by them as he is:

JARAMILLO
Monctezuma ordered this?

She moves to leave.

JARAMILLO
--don't go.

MALI
It's customary to join the dance and honor the gods.

Mali walks away-- Alvarado passes her, leering eyes, then squats down with Jaramillo; looks to the sky:

ALVARADO
Enjoying God's creations? Or just one of them?

Jaramillo shoots him a dirty look.

ALVARADO
(casual quip)
I hear we're all gonna hang when Velasquez gets here.

JARAMILLO
We're meeting the Cholulans tomorrow. Supposedly, they're goldsmiths for the lord of Tenochtitlan.

ALVARADO
That what she told you? You trust her?

Jaramillo glares at him coldly.

ALVARADO
Does the General have a battle plan?

JARAMILLO
We'll trade with glass beads.

ALVARADO
At the end of muskets, I would hope.

Cortes approaches from behind-- fills Alvarado's cup.

CORTES
Captain Alvarado's right, Juan. Make a full battle plan, just in case. This isn't a game of chess with the king.

The Cacique CALLS out to Cortes-- waving a gold ceremonial cup wildly.

CORTES
The pieces on the board are unpredictable.

Cortes returns to the Cacique; drinks from the gold cup.

ALVARADO
Holy Mother of God.

Mali has entered the dance with the hypnotic, gyrating women. She unties her hair-- removes her serape-- leaving her with nothing but a loin cloth-- graceful, otherworldly.

ALVARADO
Look at the men!

Jaramillo stands up, worried; his eyes move to gaping Soldiers. He watches Mali nervously.

ALVARADO
The Captain General should just bend that lovely heathen over and--

It's quick-- Jaramillo has Alvarado by the throat but Alvarado's drawn a knife reflexively; Jaramillo backs off. Alvarado spits and walks away, glances back:

ALVARADO
Unless <u>you</u> already have.

**AT THE HEAD TABLE**

Cortes stares into the Cacique's cup; his eyes are glazed and he's struggling to keep them open.

*This is not Octli, this is something else.*

He focuses on Mali as she dances; all he sees is pure sex. He stumbles to her-- almost falls. The Cacique escorts him outside.

**EXT. TLAXCALAN COURTYARD - NIGHT**

Jaramillo watches the night sky as TLAXCALAN BOYS gather and GIGGLE, watching him. They tentatively approach, urge him up, surrounding him, leading him by the hand around the corner.

**IN A SMALL DIRT ARENA**

MORE BOYS kick a rubber ball around in keep away fashion(a backyard variation of soccer); it comes flying right at Jaramillo-- he kicks it and charges into play.

IN THE BACKGROUND: Mali leaves the dance, covering herself; she arrives to join them. Soon, they're both competitively playing against each other with the LAUGHING boys.

Then, the Boys are drawn to the wall; they peer over it, pointing, CHATTERING between themselves.

**EXT. TLAXCALAN COURTYARD - NIGHT**

Cortes retches up the brew. The Cacique attends him MUMBLING encouragement as other Tlaxcalan's gather around.

PULL OUT TO REVEAL: The darkened battle field is now burning with funeral pyres of TLAXCALAN DEAD-- surrounded by dancing lone PRIESTS in ceremonial masks.

Jaramillo leaps over the wall and pushes the Cacique aside; then, Mali's right there.

JARAMILLO
What's wrong with him?

MALI
It's a potion which allows a man to speak with the gods.

JARAMILLO
Could he die?

MALI
They've been doing this for a thousand years with their Caciques. No harm will come to him.

Jaramillo warily watches the CACKLING Cacique follow a stumbling Cortes into the field of pyres and point.

*Cacique sees what Cortes sees.*

**CORTES' VISION**

In the distance, the funeral pyres burn with eerie flames which suddenly SHOOT UP and shimmer mysteriously:

And become PHANTOM AZTEC WARRIORS. A glimpse of Cuauhtemoc's FORM materializes walking towards us; body painted in white ash. *Then, disappearing like a ghost.*

PHANTOM QUETZALS (iridescent green and red trogon birds) erupt out of the fires, incinerating, hissing into flame-- then gone. Now, only embers floating to the sky.

Then BAM-- Cortes is there as:

**TENOCHTITLAN BURNS**

An island floating on a lake of boiling gold. Cortes stands atop the great blue and red pyramid-- blinded by it.

Priests lay Monctezuma back on the sacrificial altar as: A ceremonially dressed Mali and two small (Spanish/Nahuatl) Blue eyed, dark skinned, MIXED BLOOD CHILDREN watch.

Jaramillo ascends the steps and drives a sword through Monctezuma's heart. In a flash, the entire city and step pyramid come CRASHING down, disappearing within the golden, boiling lake.

**EXT. BEYOND THE TLAXCALAN COURTYARD - NIGHT**

A smiling Mali leads Jaramillo away from it all into a hidden, private place under a canopy of entwining flowers.

JARAMILLO
(chuckling)
I've never seen him like that-- I wish the King's portrait maker could've have captured that image.

He turns to her-- laughter in her eyes. She holds his gaze.

MALI
I am alone. Like you.

JARAMILLO
I'm not alone. I'm just-- (shrugs)

MALI
A man and woman can come together like the earth and sky for just one night. And in that one moment, they are no longer alone.

This strikes something in his heart; we can see it in his eyes--

--her warmth pulls him in-- desperate hands shed clothing-- bodies entwine as naturally as God meant them to--

--and we find Jaramillo's soon taken over by a tenderness; never has he been so tender in his life. In the end, he finds himself silently weeping in her arms.

**NIGHT PASSES**

Jaramillo is awakened from Mali's embrace by the SOUNDS of:

**EXT. TLAXCALAN VILLAGE - FIRST LIGHT**

Cortes wanders aimlessly about in the field-- smoldering low burning pyres-- CRYING OUT. The Cacique LAUGHS; pleased.

A half dressed Jaramillo sprints onto the field, lifting Cortes to his feet--

CORTES
I saw an empire of such riches!

--leading him away-- supporting him.

JARAMILLO
Another good dream.

CORTES
No! It was real. Promise me you won't leave until my vision is realized. Swear it!

JARAMILLO
Too much drink, Hernan--

CORTES
--it was you-- you took the city. The sword of Cortes-- Juan Jaramillo himself took the city of gold down. You ran it through the heart of a demon.

JARAMILLO
Tell you what-- I'll give you my sword-- you take the city down.

CORTES
Ah puta madre-- I love you! You're my brother-- swear you won't leave me until the city is mine.

Jaramillo heaves Cortes into the wagon.

CORTES
Where's Mali? I want to drive myself into her softness.

JARMILLO
Mali is asleep in the village.

CORTES
She's going to bare my children--

Jaramillo closes the door to the wagon, leans against it, SLAMS a fist into the door and strides away.

**EXT. BEYOND THE TLAXCALAN COURTYARD - FIRST LIGHT**

Jaramillo finds Mali where he left her, she sleepily rouses and smiles.

JARAMILLO
Tell me all you know of the Cholulans. Will you draw a map of their city?

He slides his journal and quill from his jacket; she draws.

JARAMILLO
Do you know any of them by name or face?

MALI
My family shared many holidays with the K'niche and his family.

JARAMILLO
Good. You can explain that we won't confiscate-- we'll trade.

He studies her drawing.

JARAMILLO
The city is significant. You're sure they won't defend against us?

MALI
(softly curious)
Why do you care so much? The other Spanish don't.

*Because of you.*

JARAMILLO
I've been ordered to subdue them if necessary.

He makes quick notes and sketches, then straps on his scabbard; kisses her tenderly.

JARMILLO
I'll see you at the wagon. We're moving out soon.

And he's gone.

**EXT. TLAXCALAN CARAVAN CAMP - LATER - DAY**

SOLDIERS gear up in Spanish armor and prepare for upcoming battle; horses are tacked, dogs unchained and moved out.

Jaramillo is troubled by it; his eyes pan the area for Cortes.

In the distance, MEN raise a cross and a city marker at the Tlaxcalan village. Cortes rides past the cross on a simple infantry horse-- straight to Jaramillo. He's not well.

CORTES
My prize stallion's gone missing.

SOLDIER'S SHOUTS ring out from beyond the caravan; Jaramillo rushes to follow Cortes-- already riding towards:

**EXT. TLAXCALAN JUNGLE - DAY**

Cortes rides in slowly; pensive. Alvarado and SOLDIERS stand back, stunned. The stallion hangs upside down from an ancient tree-- flayed of skin.

A very YOUNG OFFICER SANDOVAL, slight and pale, kisses his heavy gold crucifix hanging from his neck. He takes Cortes' horse's reins. Cortes dismounts and stares at the stallion's carcass.

CORTES
Who would do such a thing?

JARAMILLO (O.S.)
Maybe Aztec. We're near their territory now.

Cortes turns to the just arrived Jaramillo; matter of fact.

CORTES
Go with force today and execute all prisoners.

JARAMILLO
You've acquired some knowledge since last night?

CORTES
In my vision, Tenochtitlan is taken by stealth.

JARAMILLO
You'd murder because of a vision--

CORTES
--I'd do it because the Cholulans will become informants.

JARAMILLO
These people are allies. They despise Aztecs.

Cortes' fists clench:

CORTES
Then, take them as slave bounty and send them to the king.

JARAMILLO
No--

CORTES
--no?

JARAMILLO
It's been a long night. Call an officer's meeting.

MORE SOLDIERS are gathering and they're listening.

CORTES
Do not challenge me.

JARAMILLO
Then I'll call it.

Jaramillo walks away; the Soldiers and Sandoval can't believe Jaramillo's insubordination-- neither can Cortes:

CORTES
Sandoval-- take the captain to my quarters and secure him inside.
(beat)
Juan!

Jaramillo turns-- Young Sandoval approaches, musket loaded and aimed.

YOUNG SANDOVAL
Arms above your head, Sir, and walk on.

Jaramillo pushes Sandoval's musket aside and goes straight for Cortes. He's stopped by Alvarado and THREE SOLDIER'S sword points.

JARAMILLO
You claim to build an empire on fairness and this is how you begin?

Cortes snatches Jaramillo's leather binder from his belt.

CORTES
Remember why you came Captain-- it had nothing to do with governing.

Sandoval pushes his musket into Jaramillo's back; marches him away. Cortes tosses the leather binder to Alvarado:

CORTES
Your battle plans.

ALVARADO
(surprised)
Thank you, Sir.

CORTES
Don't let us down, Captain.

Cortes mounts his horse as Alvarado secures Cortes' saddle cinch.

ALVARADO
When I saw them last night, I knew it was just a matter of time. You want to break him, you break him with her.
(off Cortes' expression)
God's truth-- they were together just like the good Lord intended.

Cortes wheels his horse around almost trampling Alvarado. WHIPS its flank and rides the now leaping animal, swiftly away. He joins the departing Calvary.

**EXT. CORTES' WAGON - DAY**

Sandoval locks the wagon securely; Mali is led away by a Soldier. Perplexed, she glances back.

**INT. CORTES' WAGON - DAY**

Jaramillo opens a weapon's trunk; SCOFFS. Inside, a halberd; (a Spanish spear with a curving axe head.)

**EXT. CORTES' WAGON - DAY**

A moment of stillness, then, Jaramillo HACKS the wagon door open, snatches a musket-- steals away low and fast. Mounts a bareback horse with nothing but a rawhide halter; rides out.

**EXT. CHOLULAN JUNGLE - FOLLOWING**

Jaramillo rides through jungle terrain traveling fast; then: Brings his horse to a skidding halt-- dismounts, running hard, carrying the flintlock musket. He flashes through the jungle branches and sees it in the distance:

**EXT. CHOLULAN (GOLDSMITH'S) CITY - DAY**

The looted, smoldering, wreckage of stucco homes surrounding a courtyard, a stone temple and A MOUNTAIN OF RAW GOLD being loaded onto a cart. Mali-- in a daze, living a waking nightmare as:

ON CORTES and a line up of MUSKETEERS facing: The ELDERLY and the extremely YOUNG, huddling in a tight group.

Mali's eyes are honed on an ELDERLY K'NICHE (KING) embracing his WIFE.

CORTES
Prime-- load!
(a beat)
Fire!

Musketeers UNLOAD in unison. 100 innocent souls drop to the ground-- some still moving.

Mali CRIES OUT and rushes to the K'niche's and Wife's BODIES.

MORE SOBBING from the courtyard: SOLDIERS and TLAXCALANS brand CRYING, viable Cholulans with Cortes' slave logo; the skin of their cheeks blistering as they're held down.

But even Alvarado takes no pleasure in this-- he's grappling with TWO SMALL CHILDREN as Soldiers dip branding irons into hot coals and approach.

POP-POP-POP! More musket fire as Cortes and his men struggle to finish off execution survivors-- priming-- reloading.

Jaramillo BLASTS OUT from the treeline, riding fast; wild eyed and low on his horse.

JARAMILLO
Cease your fire!

WE FOLLOW a MUSKET BALL as it BLASTS from the barrel-- cutting through the air and embedding into Jaramillo's galloping horse.

Jaramillo's horse goes down from under him, rolling forward on its ear.

CLOSE ON CORTES: Lowering his musket, Mali huddling at his feet, hands covering her head.

Jaramillo sees her as: A Tlaxcalan (Cortes) WARRIOR charges him-- raising a bladed club. Jaramillo lifts his musket mid stride-- BOOM-- we hear the ball slice the air.

Lead sprays into the Tlaxcalan warrior-- blowing him back violently.

Jaramillo cuts diagonally-- running flat out towards Cortes. Swinging the empty musket like a ball bat, SLAMMING it into ATTACKERS--

Cortes hurries to reload; aims at Jaramillo.

--Jaramillo's musket butt SLAMS into Cortes' belly. Cortes balls up on the ground; searing pain.

Jaramillo cuts to the courtyard-- culling two more muskets-- moving fast-- raising them both from the hip:

BOOM----- BOOM! Catapulting two TLAXCALANS back.

Alvarado sees Jaramillo coming for him. Drops the CRYING CHILD he's holding by the leg-- raises his hands in the air and drops to knees.

ALVARADO
Juan! No! I'm under orders!

Jaramillo's hesitation is all the TWO SOLDIERS behind him need-- they tackle him. Alvarado works fast-- ties Jaramillo's feet and hands, winds the rope around the saddle horn of a horse.

And for a sad moment, flat on his belly, Jaramillo takes in the sheer horror around him-- CRYING, SUFFERING CHOLULANS.

But a moment is all he has before Alvarado mounts up--

--and drags Jaramillo at a gallop; raw pain as Jaramillo's body is jolted over rocks and cactus. And comes to a skidding halt in front of:

CORTES
Take him back. Chain him to a stake for all the men to see. Because he's Juan Jaramillo (shouts out) he'll see a fair trial for the attempted murder of a superior!

Cortes squats down and WHISPERS:

CORTES
How dare you take her right from under me?

JARAMILLO
Take her-- I--

CORTES
Know this, you will hang-- if for anything, for that.

Alvarado dismounts to untie Jaramillo from the long rope.

CORTES
No. He goes back like the dog he is, on a leash.

Mali loses her mind, CRYING OUT-- Cortes restraining her.

It's torturous as Jaramillo is gruesomely dragged across the expansive field-- littered with unavoidable bodies.

Mali struggles in Cortes' embrace, impotently attacking him.

MALI
You're no better than the Huey Tlatoani-- murdering defenseless people! You're a coward-- you can't even face your own Captain like a man!

Cortes SLAPS her hard--

MALI
Men like you should just die, then the world would be good.

--shoves her into the arms of a Soldier, then remounts his horse. The Soldier heaves her over Cortes' horse's withers; Cortes cantors away, Mali slung over his lap in front of him.

**EXT. CHOLULAN CARAVAN CAMP - LATER - NIGHT**

Officer Saenz (opening scene) sits idle with six wagons and open trunks of Cholulan gold. He's attended by 30 SOLDIERS.

Alvarado arrives, checks each trunk and makes notes.

SAENZ
Fool said he'd use us to strip the land-- split it with his noble friends? He didn't look so noble when you dragged him over that battle field-- through piss and blood.
(a beat)
What the hell happened to him?

ALVARADO
A woman.

Saenz sweats in the humidity; removes his shirt and we see his body is covered in exotic indigenous tattoos.

ALVARADO
Just make sure this gets to Veracruz safely. If Cortes can hang Jaramillo, he can hang anyone.

Saenz swats a mosquito with an inked hand:

SAENZ
I survived Cordoba. I'll survive the Captain General.

**EXT. CORTES' WAGON - NIGHT**

Jaramillo's chained to a stake; his body scraped, shredded. The pain's so intense, it's hard to focus.

He stares at Cortes' wagon-- a blur. And becomes aware of someone watching him. Cortes squats down-- eye to eye:

CORTES
No one defies me and survives.

JARAMILLO
--believed in you-- defended you, more than once.

CORTES
You believed because like all great men, I lie with the truth. It's a skill. Like a man's skill at warfare. I'm a politician.

JARAMILLO
As a man who's skill is warfare, I tell you-- when you look a man in the eye and take his life, he knows why.

CORTES
You have no right to judge me.

JARAMILLO
No-- that's way above my mortal rank. But you-- somebody tells you might resemble a god and you start to believe you are one.

CORTES
I didn't become Captain General without good reason--

JARAMILLO
--you had me.

CORTES
And that is the crux of it.
(a beat)
Captains causing dissent within the ranks-- it's no way to pacify a country.

JARAMILLO
Neither is genocide.

A cold, evil beat:

CORTES
You may not hang. But I will make you wish you did.

Cortes strides to Mali's locked wagon, unbolts the door, unbuttoning his breaches:

JARAMILLO
Hernan--

CORTES
--this is my expedition. My men, my horses, my dogs.

Steps inside; kicks the door closed.

JARAMILLO
HERNAN!

**INT. CORTES' WAGON - NIGHT**

A single candle burns. Mali waits with linen and ointment in her lap.

MALI
Jaramillo's wounds--

Cortes wrangles her back, rolls her under him.

MALI
It's a sin to take a Nahua against her will!

CORTES
It isn't a sin, if it's not your choice.

He flattens his mouth onto hers.

**EXT. CORTES' WAGON - NIGHT**

(A CRY from the wagon.) Jaramillo's chained to the stake-- a SURGEON cleans his wounds as Jaramillo fights desperately to free himself.

A SOLDIER holds him down:

JARAMILLO
HERNAN!!!

The surgeon attempts to pour a syrupy liquid down Jaramillo's throat-- he spits it out.

SURGEON
Once I get some poppy into him, he won't feel anything.

The Soldier holds Jaramillo down; the surgeon covers Jaramillo's nose and eyes with a filthy rag and pours.

The last thing Jaramillo hears is Mali's muffled SOBS before the opium's influence sweeps over him.

**EXT. MOUNTAIN CLIFF OVERLOOKING TENOCHTITLAN - DAY**

SCOUTS CALL OUT for Cortes to ride up the hill, waving excitedly. Cortes kicks his horse up the rocky incline, followed by a SCRIBE, Alvarado and Young Sandoval.

A staggering vision touches his eyes; he dismounts his horse and walks towards it in a daze:

Below, an enormous lake; its center, the island city of Tenochtitlan. It is a circle with four timber bridges which form a cross. Surrounded by lofty mountains and smoking volcanoes, even the sea connects to the lake; its engineered tides rising and falling into fresh waters with a powerful stream. Flocks of birds scatter across its glassy surface.

CORTES
Sweet mother of God-- never let me wake.

YOUNG SANDOVAL
Grander than Seville, Sir.

Canoes navigate transportation channels rivaling Venice itself; public districts, squares, markets, porticos.

And in the middle of it all: The blue and red step pyramid.

Cortes takes a breath; this is his vision. The scribe sketches schematics furiously.

ALVARADO
There must be 200,000 of them down there. With Tlaxcalans, we're only twenty five, give or take a few thousand savages.

YOUNG SANDOVAL
Those savages are more risk than asset. In truth we're only 200 Spanish and a few cannons and war dogs.

CORTES
You see those bridges? All but one can be cut, isolating the governing faction.

ALVARADO
Let famine do the work.

Cortes' thinks a moment-- his hands shake subtly-- he SWEARS:

CORTES
Puta Madre--

Snatches the freshly inked schematics from the Scribe, mounts his horse and rides down the hill.

YOUNG SANDOVAL
There's fish in the lake, birds, the markets are floating vegetable gardens. I've even heard they're cannibals. Alvarado, you know nothing about siege, do you?

Sandoval strides away, smiling.

YOUNG SANDOVAL
They could last years and never once set foot on land.

ALVARADO
I know how to execute a battle.

YOUNG SANDOVAL
Not this kind. Not without Jaramillo, you don't.

**EXT. CORTES' WAGON - DAY**

Jaramillo's unconscious-- sprawled out; body scraped and scabbing-- bloody ankle chained to the stake. Water SPLATTERS onto his face. Cortes stands over him with a tin cup. Jaramillo glances to the wagon; it's open and empty.

Cortes drops the schematics in front of him but Jaramillo's still trained on the wagon.

CORTES
LOOK AT ME!

Jaramillo's gaze slowly focuses on Cortes.

CORTES
I intend to conquer these people and rule. Exterminate their government but preserve their population. A dead goose lays no eggs, golden or otherwise. Unfortunately, I need you to give it to me.

Jaramillo's eyes move to the schematics.

CORTES
You'll be paid in gold, one full measure.
(a beat)
I'd throw the woman in-- but I erased your claim. You wouldn't want her now.
(a beat)
Or would you?

PULL OUT TO REVEAL: Mali peers from the dense overgrowth, not more than a few feet away. A face wet with tears, she disappears into the jungle.

Jaramillo meets Cortes' gaze steadily:

JARAMILLO
There's no deal without her.

CORTES
The entire world-- for a wagon full of gold and one woman.

Cortes unlocks the ankle chain, tosses the leather binder down and walks away; CALLS BACK.

CORTES
Why you'd want to take a savage back to Spain is beyond me.

Jaramillo checks the wagon-- shoves his binder into his waistband and takes off into the jungle on foot. He tracks Mali in the last light of day; about to give up:

**EXT. MOUNTAIN CLIFF OVERLOOKING TENOCHTITLAN - NIGHT**

Walks up the rise and sees her standing on the precipice; a ledge of granite with a 100 foot drop off.

JARAMILLO
Mali--

She spins back; he reaches out to her.

JARAMILLO
Come down.

MALI
Can you not hear the death out there?

The darkness is alive with the SOUNDS of animals SCREECHING, HOWLING-- something dying every second.

JARAMILLO
I hear only life. Come here.

MALI
I hear the voices of the Cholulans.

JARAMILLO
Today was not your fault.

MALI
My enemies will now live under Cortes. And my friends will die under him.

She steps back-- heels to the razor's edge-- tears streaking her dirty face. She speaks so softly we barely hear it:

MALI
I leave no one behind or alone.

JARAMILLO
No-- don't-- because without you--

And he moves smoothly and quickly it's almost mystical.

JARAMILLO
--I am alone.

She leans back, gravity pulling her and he's there-- SNAP! He's got her by the arm and pulls her into him.

**EXT. MOUNTAIN CLIFF OVERLOOKING TENOCHTITLAN - NIGHT**

Mali and Jaramillo sit quietly on the precipice, gazing at the city below. THE STARS WHEEL OVERHEAD with the passing of night.

**EXT. MOUNTAIN CLIFF OVERLOOKING TENOCHTITLAN - FIRST LIGHT**

A sliver of sunlight breaks the horizon. Mali is asleep; Jaramillo studies the city-- he scribbles fervently, taking notes in his leather binder. We see a hint of ship's schematics, a map crossing mountains, a dam, and mathematics; long running equations.

Then, something FLICKERS on Tenochtitlan's land bridge; Jaramillo abruptly stands: a procession of shadowy FIGURES slowly cross it.

JARAMILLO
Mi Dios--

He wakes her-- takes her hand; they run towards the path.

**EXT. CORTES' CAMP - FIRST LIGHT OF DAY**

SCOUTS are passing news; the camp is alive and alerted. Cortes, on his knees, peers through a telescope from on top of an outcropping of boulders.

Jaramillo WHISPERS to an angry Mali, perhaps a comfort, as he leads her up to Cortes. He's tense; Cortes is friendly:

CORTES
They're coming across. Am I the enemy or a returning god?

He smiles pleasantly at Mali. She spits at him-- a fire in her hateful eyes. He CHUCKLES, passes the scope to a tightly controlled Jarmillo:

CORTES
They're carrying flowers.

THROUGH THE SCOPE: AZTEC ATTENDANTS carry many baskets filled with flowers and GLINTING GOLDEN OBJECTS. They lay them out like offerings at the end of the bridge.

Jaramillo coaxes Mali to take the scope; she looks and returns it. Jaramillo nods to her-- 'answer Cortes.'

MALI
They come in a fashion that's only reserved for kings and gods.

CORTES
We're going in with fifty.

JARAMILLO
We haven't discussed battle strategy-- and I would seek council on how an Aztec god behaves.

CORTES
(nasty quip)
Oh. She's seen one?

Cortes descends from the outcropping and mounts a waiting horse below. Alvarado meets him.

ALVARADO
The Tlaxcalans are mustered from the back end camp, Sir.

CORTES
(calls up to Jaramillo)
Give him his orders, Captain.

But Jaramillo's honed on Tenochtitlan; analyzing, memorizing the landscape. Mali pointing, WHISPERING to him.

CORTES
Captain Jaramillo-- the man needs orders.

Jaramillo never takes his eyes off the land below; it's clear he despises every second he's forced to aid Cortes.

JARAMILLO
(to Alvarado)
Stay just outside the land bridge in the high country. Rotate the men for meals and keep the Tlaxcalans quiet. Under no circumstances do you release Tlaxcalans into the city.

Alvarado tightens the cinch of Cortes' saddle; Cortes stares at Alvarado's hand-- takes it into his leather gloved grip and observes: An OOZING RED BLISTER. Cortes speaks so low we barely hear him:

CORTES
You're not to enter the city, either.

ALVARADO
(puzzled)
Yes Sir.

**EXT. BRIDGE TO TENOCHTITLAN - DAY**

The reflection of the red and blue step pyramid wavers in the crystal clear lake waters.

Horses hooves CLOP-CLOP-CLOP over great timbers composing the land bridge. They ride ten abreast, 50 SPANISH in full battle regalia, each with 3 matchlock muskets.

Mali clings to Jaramillo's waist riding double. He's dressed in a worn, leather quilted battle vest and bergindina; a double handed broadsword and two muskets are secured to his saddle. His PAGE walks alongside; well equipped.

Cortes, seated on his horse like a king, is out front, leading; his GROOM riding shot gun.

Cortes is dressed in formal attire-- tall leather boots, doublet, shiny breastplate and puffed pants. His helmet's bright plumes quiver in the soft breeze; he glances back:

CORTES
That's him-- the man you're going to kill.

Cortes commands everyone to stop with raised fist. From fifty feet down bridge, he stares directly into the eyes of:

Monctezuma sits quietly on a litter inlaid with shells and padded with soft cotton fabrics. On his head is a halo of bright green and red feathers. His gold earrings and nose guard glint in the sun.

Monctezuma's many Wives surround him. His Children fidget at their feet. In stark juxtaposition are the Priests-- they now wear the whole skins of Leopards.

Behind them are the NOBLES. The land bridge is packed with them 100 yards dense; a sea of flowers. Each holds magnolias, cacao blooms, sunflowers, popcorn flowers, in wreaths, garlands and everywhere golden necklaces, pendants and precious stones.

Cortes gestures, commands, to those high in the jungle hills: CANNON FIRE ERUPTS IN FIERY BURSTS.

Monctezuma startles but maintains his steely composure, people drop to their knees across the entire bridge, then: NO ONE MOVES-- COMPLETE SILENCE-- a BABY CRIES.

Mali squeezes her eyes closed.

JARAMILLO
Take a breath.

She fingers a dagger in the hand-me-down war vest she's wearing-- slides down from Jaramillo's horse and comes to stand at Cortes' horse's flank.

Monctezuma is helped down from the litter with great care; a 7ft tall ALBINO NAHUATL, white hair and white eyebrows, supports him so he can walk. Attendants rush to lay cotton down at his feet, he waves them off and:

JINGLING BELLS grace his ankles and CHIME with each sandaled step. It is a long walk and a slow and ungraceful thing as he goes to his knees in subjugation at Cortes' horses' feet.

Mali's anger is just below the surface.

CORTES
Introduce me as the god Quetzacoatl. Tell him he has nothing to fear.

Mali TRANSLATES; Monctezuma looks deep into Cortes' eyes then with great formality, SPEAKS. Mali REPEATS his words:

MALI
I welcome you to your city of which I have kept for you. Come and rest yourself after your long journey from the unknown. What you see here, is yours, all that I own.

Cortes' eyes glisten; he removes his helmet, dismounts and presents Monctezuma with a necklace of pearls and glass. Cortes lays a hand on Monctezuma's head gently; Monctezuma tenses and summons:

Albino Nahuatl presents a gold calendar disc to Cortes as stunned Soldiers are gifted heavy gold necklaces. Jaramillo can't believe what he's witnessing-- brilliant golden light reflects onto Cortes' face.

*Cortes does not know what it is but-- it is gold.*

CORTES
I accept-- and honor my humble servant Monctezuma for his excellent stewardship of my city.

A stoic Monctezuma is escorted back to his litter by Albino Nahuatl. Cortes and Mali are signaled to join him; Cortes proudly swaggers to the litter.

**EXT. BRIDGE TO TENOCHTITLAN - FOLLOWING**

Cortes and Mali ride in Monctezuma's litter as Jaramillo rides behind them. Soldiers follow in a hammer shock of disbelief.

Monctezuma turns to a stoic Mali; eyes burning from behind his golden nose guard and SPEAKS in NAHUATL:

MONCTEZUMA
So, you are the tree that has grown between two great rocks.

Mali tenses-- fingering the dagger in her vest.

MONCTEZUMA
Who's child do you carry, girl? The eagle's? (nods to Jaramillo) Or the snake's? (nods to Cortes)

Mali GASPS and like a slow poison taking hold, we get the feeling she believes his unnatural musings. She steels herself and RESPONDS in NAHUATL:

MALI
If there's life within me, Tlatoque, men like you will have murdered it before it ever had a chance to grow.

Monctezuma smiles subtly.

CORTES
What did he say?
(a beat of thought)
If I'm the god, why don't I speak Nahuatl?

MALI
It's beneath you.

CORTES
Who are you supposed to be-- my queen?
(off Mali's expression)
And he believes this nonsense?

MALI
(hissed)
Why shouldn't he? My blood's as royal as his.

Cortes LAUGHS.

CORTES
As long as he thinks I can end the world by lifting my little finger.

Unconcerned he settles back. Jaramillo watches them from his position behind the litter. He senses Mali's odd energy. *Something's not right.*

They cross the bridge. Cortes becomes aware of floating markets, PEOPLE hocking earthenware, spices, skeins of colored cloth, and every kind of food imaginable.

*Cortes surveys it like he owns it.*

PEOPLE SMILE and bow, waving, gawking, pointing as they pass. Children GIGGLE and run alongside. OTHERS step back in fear when seeing men riding on horses-- strange six legged gods indeed.

*Cortes nods casually to them like a king.*

Monctezuma leans close to Mali once again, nods to Jaramillo riding behind them and SPEAKS in Nahuatl:

MONCTEZUMA
I will negotiate only with the Eagle. He will come alone. If you tell the Snake what I say to you, I will end this charade and battle will break out. Do not jeopardize the lives of your friends.

Mali reaches for her dagger; Monctezuma shoves it back into her vest covertly. Mali doesn't know whether to--

MONCTEZUMA
(off her expression)
You are your own enemy, girl, if you do not heed my words.

--Monctezuma meets eyes with Cortes and nods graciously. Mali glances back to Jaramillo-- sharp anger mixed with fear.

*And Jaramillo's field awareness kicks into overdrive.*

They exit the land bridge and enter:

**EXT. TENOCHTITLAN - FOLLOWING**

Towering temples shade fragrant streets lined with blooming vines.

*Jaramillo memorizes his surroundings.*

Palaces and apartments of limestone and stucco seem to float above the water-- laced within elaborate canals.

*Jaramillo jots notes in his journal.*

PEOPLE bow down randomly; finely dressed and groomed-- odd black hair cut short like bowls-- but here and there-- we find AZTEC WARRIORS armed and posted inconspicuously.

*Jaramillo seems to be estimating their numbers.*

The procession winds around a corner: a bazaar; silver, gold, lead, brass, bones, shells, snails, eggs, feathers. Another turn, another street; an apothecary-- medicinals.

*Mali continues to glance back to Jaramillo.*

Then a market: live fowl-- quail, ducks, doves, parrots, eagles, hawks, owls. The smell of exotic foods wafts through the air: breads, meats, wood burning stoves on every corner.

*Jaramillo's eyes scan every detail.*

He wheels his horse back and sidles up next to Young Sandoval who's leading the 50 Spanish Soldiers.

**EXT. MONCTEZUMA'S PALACE - DAY**

Monctezuma's litter disappears inside a palace of expert craftsmanship. The 50 Soldiers led by Sandoval, wait for Jaramillo's orders. Jaramillo tears a page from his journal; a map.

JARAMILLO
Station yourselves around the palace parameter-- it runs south by southeast three city blocks, be discreet-- but for God's sakes be ready. We are 50, they are at least a thousand fighting men.

YOUNG SANDOVAL
You suspect treachery?

JARAMILLO
Overlooking the city--
(opens a journal page)
--I saw them performing military exercises.
(frustrated with himself)
I dismissed it as routine when I saw the gifts.

YOUNG SANDOVAL
We have firepower-- we have an edge, Sir.

Jaramillo nods to the distant jungle hills across the bridge.

JARAMILLO
Our fire power's out there-- this is not a city to be taken. It's a coffin.

YOUNG SANDOVAL
Inform the Captain General, Sir.

Jaramillo's already heading to the palace-- his steps urgent.

YOUNG SANDOVAL
Sir!

Sandoval attempts to push through the thick knot of people; can't.

**INT. MONCTEZUMA'S PALACE - DAY**

A grand corridor of pools surrounded by galleries filled with Nobles conversing-- all look away respectfully as Monctezuma is escorted, alone, into a private passageway.

YOUNG GIRLS, who's faces are painted in yellow ochre, release butterflies in Cortes' and Mali's path. CHILDREN swarm to Mali, touching her, joyously smiling, offering curios.

She's tense and preoccupied-- her eyes searching for Jaramillo, but: *They're just children.*

She accepts the curios somberly-- a forced politeness.

Jaramillo pushes forward through the dense crowds. Suddenly, he meets the downward gaze of the 7ft Albino Nahuatl who presents a clay tablet with the likeness of Monctezuma. He motions Jaramillo follow. Perplexed, Jaramillo weighs the situation and:

**INT. MONCTEZUMA'S PALACE - CHAMBER OF CALENDARS - DAY**

Jaramillo is led by Albino Nahuatl into an enormous gallery covered in reliefs of monstrous gods. In its center is a stone, inlaid, circular floor. It is a giant double calendar (Tonalpohualli and Xiuhpohualli.)

Center of the floor-calendar, a blooming cacao plant with a single feeding BUMBLE BEE. It's so quiet we can hear its HUM. Monctezuma sits on a leather pillow watching it.

Alone in this vacuous place he is devoid of pomp, wearing only a loincloth. A clay bowl with strips of linen in his lap, he holds a sharp sting ray needle between two fingers.

Albino Nahuatl WHISPERS to him. Without turning, Monctezuma SPEAKS with difficulty as if trying to find the words:

<u>Because he's SPEAKING IN SPANISH.</u>

MONCTEZUMA
You are in-- place-- of great truth.

Jaramillo eyes Albino Nahuatl-- his hand covertly moves to his short sword.

MONCTEZUMA
There is-- no violence-- here.

JARAMILLO
Where did you learn our language?

MONCTEZUMA
Spanish. Year--

He points to a segment of the floor calendar:

MONCTEZUMA
We-- keep time-- since birth of stars. I-- not remember.
(points to his 'mind')
Old men-- forget-- time.

JARAMILLO
Why did you ask for me? Why not-- Capt-- Quetzacoatl?

Monctezuma struggles to rise and presents the bowl and Sting Ray needle.

MONCTEZUMA
Many-- many years ago-- my duty-- I offer-- most sacred blood-- to the gods. The-- sting ray's needle-- no good to me. One day, I do it no more. I fear-- big fear. I fear the world-- come to <u>end</u>. Without my blood-- elders tell me whole world-- all-- will end.

Monctezuma slowly opens his loin cloth and exposes his genitalia to Jaramillo; all we see is an expression of absolute pain wipe across Jaramillo's face.

MONCTEZUMA
Sun rose good that day-- and my eyes see-- I am no god.
(a beat)
Your lord-- no Quetzacoatl. He-- Spanish.

Jaramillo tenses-- realizing the game is up.

MONCTEZUMA
No-- no violence-- here.

Monctezuma hobbles to corner, capturing a slow moving tarantula.

MONCTEZUMA
My ancestors learn all-- from Quetzacoatl-- they write-- his wisdom for us-- to read.

It crawls up his forearm.

MONCTEZUMA
I read-- as boy, to be spider in corner-- when faced with enemy-- to wait. When enemy caught in web-- I strike.

MONCTEZUMA
This day-- your Lord-- fell-- into my web.

Jaramillo's eyes pan the room suspiciously; nothing but Monctezuma and Albino Nahuatl. Monctezuma releases the Tarantula in a high corner with gentle hands.

MONCTEZUMA
You see powerful king-- no. I am simple man. I grow my children, I make love my wives. But-- I will end all Spanish to see them safe.

Something in Moctezuma's words moves Jaramillo. Monctezuma reaches out his hand with a "come with me." Moctezuma motions Albino to wait.

**INT. MONCTEZUMA'S PALACE - DARK HALL - FOLLOWING**

Monctezuma leads Jaramillo down a jasper tiled hall within the bowels of the earth. A flame flickers in the distance.

**INT. MONCTEZUMA'S PALACE - TOMB - CONTINUOUS**

Torch light illuminates a chamber lined with SOLID GOLD WALLS as Jaramillo and Monctezuma enter.

An enormous GOLD CROCODILE presides over the remains of a long dead emperor on a platform; nothing but dust and bones.

And the crocodile has a nest-- IT IS FILLED WITH EMERALDS IN THE LIKENESS OF EGGS.

MONCTEZUMA
I am told, you want-- gold.
(points to dust and bones)
This man-- could not take it with him. Maybe you succeed where others fail-- can you-- win against death?

Jaramillo walks the room slowly.

MONCTEZUMA
No-- I cannot either. So why we want so bad?

Jaramillo can't meet Moctezuma's eyes. Perhaps guilt surfaces, perhaps the soldier in him-- it's hard to tell. But he speaks without malice:

JARAMILLO
More are coming-- nothing will stop them. Cortes and men like him will see victory over your city-- your provinces-- your entire world. Surrender and I can assure you the Captain General will give you amnesty.

MONCTEZUMA
We are-- the same good mind. I am sad-- we opposite sides.

Monctezuma drapes a cloak of Jaguar skins over himself with difficulty. Jaramillo helps him.

MONCTEZUMA
Your woman carry Nahuatl child. Come-- walk with-- my people.

Jaramillo's speechless.

JARAMILLO
Yes-- yours.

But then, just like Mali, Monctezuma's mystical eyes tell him this 'could' be truth.

MONCTEZUMA
Would you see his world and-- the children of his loins-- destroyed for Spanish victory?

Monctezuma takes Jaramillo's silence as 'a refusal.'

MONCTEZUMA
If I have learned one thing-- it is this-- even victory kills when you choose wrong side.

Albino Nahuatl enters swiftly and swings open a wall of gold; a door. Monctezuma exits.

**EXT. TLACHTLI BALL FIELD - DAY**

600,000 human skulls racked on an enormous wall at the end of a ball court. TWO TEAMS of four men line up, center field; soccer of the Aztec world. Flowers rain down. The stadium is FRENETIC; packed. Bets are paid, fights break out.

Cortes is in a viewing box of honor, field side, surrounded by Nobles and luxury; a stoic Mali by his side. She glances to the empty seat next to her, nervously.

Monctezuma walks slowly past-- pomp and ceremony. He's approached by the game's victorious CAPTAIN. A Priest offers Monctezuma garlands; he drapes them over the Captain's shoulders reverently-- speaks quiet words of congratulations.

The Tlachtli Captain closes his eyes and nods to Monctezuma "he's ready." The priest gives Monctezuma an obsidian "sword." Monctezuma smashes it into the Captain's skull.

Cortes watches. Mali's filled with silent hate-- for Cortes-- for Monctezuma-- for Aztecs.

CORTES
So this is the sacrifice I've been told of-- what kind of animal would take the life of a victorious man?

MALI
An animal who wishes to keep the world alive-- this is a sacred act.

CORTES
It's butchery.

MALI
What difference does it make? You sacrifice men, women and children for gold and you're not even a god.

CORTES
You defend them, Mali?

MALI
I understand them. And wish them dead. As I wish you dead.

CORTES
No you don't. Because I'm the only revenge you've got.

The BAYING of the crowd rises to unimaginable heights, distracting Cortes, as unnoticed within the frenzy, Mali slips away.

Monctezuma racks the sacrificed man's head reverently within the skulls of his predecessors-- PEOPLE flood onto the field wildly as he takes his leave.

**INT. GARDEN OF DATE PALMS - DAY**

Mali finds refuge within rows of date palms; starkly beautiful, symmetrical lines-- dreamlike.

Cuauhtemoc comes into focus behind her wearing the hide of Cortes' stallion; covered head to toe, face painted white like a ghost. It's eerie as the horse's head seems to be a part of him. *The ears prick.*

CUAUHTEMOC
(in Nahuatl)
My father has shown you compassion. He respects your royal lineage. Take the Eagle and go.

Mali wheels around, pulling her dagger. Cuauhtemoc slides behind a tree-- she darts to look behind-- nothing.

MALI
(in Nahuatl)
I can't see you but I know you're there.

Then he's behind her; studying her. She lunges, dagger raised to strike; he embraces her, driving the dagger into himself. They stay there locked in a deadly embrace:

CUAUHTEMOC
(in Nahuatl)
Take-the-Eagle-and go.

Suddenly Mali's released, the Stallion's hide collapses. Cuauhtemoc's gone as if into thin air; all that remains is the Stallion's hide crumpled on the ground and the bloody knife in her hand.

**INT. HOUSE OF THE EAGLES - DAY**

Cuauhtemoc, in a serape with bandaged abdomen, enters to find Monctezuma staring at the eagle on the pedestal; it SCREECHES. They SPEAK in NAHUATL:

MONCTEZUMA
My time is ending.

CUAUHTEMOC
A son's strength grows where his Father's weakens. I'm here for you.

MONCTEZUMA
You will never win this battle.
(places the eagle on his arm)
Take our family. Go like the ancestors-- wander the earth until the eagle touches its feet upon the cactus of a new land-- then you'll know you're home.

CUAUHTEMOC
This is our home.
(a beat)
I'll bring you the snake within the hour. Cut off his head and the rest cannot not strike.

MONCTEZUMA
You condemn him without tribunal?

CUAUHTEMOC
He is our enemy.

MONCTEZUMA
He is a man guilty of reaching for something greater, nothing more. He deserves imprisonment not death.
(off Cuauhtemoc's stunned expression)
And the woman?

CUAUHTEMOC
She will end herself because of clouded judgement. I would not make the same mistake, Father.

MONCTEZUMA
And I will not be responsible for the death of Aztec or Spanish without sound reason.

CUAUHTEMOC
Then your time has ended.

MONCTEZUMA
I have taken life when I did not want to. I've sacrificed many in many ways. And why did I do this?

CUAUHTEMOC
Because the god's would be angered. I fear for your mind, Father.

MONCTEZUMA
They do not exist, Cuauhtemoc. No, I took life for you. For all our family. For if I didn't-- the people would be angered. It is they who demand it, not the god's. We are in the people's power, they are not in ours. That is the brutal truth you must come to terms with.

Cuauhtemoc is so stunned-- he walks out on Monctezuma.

**EXT. TLACHTLI BALL FIELD - DAY**

Jaramillo searches from high in the arena seating.

A shaken Mali re-takes her seat next to Cortes. Behind them, 3 Ghost Warriors move closer and closer in stealth.

And Jaramillo's rocketing down the steps SHOUTING:

JARAMILLO
Behind you, Mali!

Cortes turns-- Mali turns; sees the Ghost Warriors. Cortes pulls Mali with him onto the field. Ghost Warriors pursue.

A dancing PRIEST passes Cortes wearing Officer Saenz' tattooed skin-- his face as if Saenz himself lives and breaths-- hair-- nose-- ears. Cortes stops, looks hard, then disappears into the crowd.

Jaramillo pushes his way towards Mali-- she stares at the gruesome dancing sight, paralyzed.

JARAMILLO
Mali!

--Mali turns back, her dagger raised as Jaramillo SLAMS past knocking her to the ground--

--Jaramillo meets the Ghost Warriors head on. Cutting one down, running another through, then smashing the butt of his sword into the last man's mouth-- shattering teeth and bone.

**EXT. PALACE PORTICO - DAY**

Sandoval leans against a wall with a handful of Soldiers casually. They smile at curious AZTEC WOMEN passing by.

Sandoval tries to lure them closer with glass beads-- the others urge him on. Suddenly, Cortes slides around the corner.

CORTES
We're under attack--

Then, Jaramillo and Mali.

JARAMILLO
--signal Alvarado-- muster the Tlaxcalans.

Young Sandoval goes for his musket-- Jaramillo's untying a Soldier's horse quickly, leading it to Mali.

Cortes pushes Sandoval back-- snatches the musket away:

CORTES
No Tlaxcalans.

MALI
Let them come-- it's their right!

Jaramillo lifts her onto the horse.

JARAMILLO
Go to the look out, wait for me there.

MALI
No.

JARMILLO
You carry my child, woman-- don't nay say me.
(off her expression)
Can you make it?

She touches his face: *This man loves her.* Jaramillo SLAPS the horse's flank and sends it racing over the bridge.

Cortes is scrambling to untie another horse, motioning to Sandoval in secret:

CORTES
(hushed/covert)
Apprehend the woman and bring me Alvarado.

Young Sandoval mounts the horse and takes off.

JARMILLO
They have an entire army laying in wait right over that wall. You don't muster those Tlaxcalans, they'll kill us!

Jaramillo goes for a horse--

CORTES
No Tlaxcalans-- they'll destroy everything.

--tightening the saddle cinch-- preparing to mount up.

CORTES
What can I do with fifty men?

JARMILLO
Nothing-- I'm leading them out right now.

Cortes blocks him from mounting up.

CORTES
We don't hold this city until we can return with resources, Spain takes everything.

JARMILLO
I don't care!

CORTES
But you care about her.

Jaramillo's eyes follow Cortes' down bridge: Young Sandoval's horse catches up with Mali's-- reaching out and grabbing the reins-- Mali's horse spins back wildly. She hits the ground hard. And then, Alvarado's riding flat out to meet them.

CORTES
Now what can I do with fifty men?

Jaramillo unties a musket from the saddle and levels it on Cortes.

CORTES
(calls out)
Shoot the woman on my command!

Down bridge Sandoval and Alvarado lead Mali back at musket point-- they stop in their tracks. Alvarado pushes Mali to her knees, ties her hands behind her back, levels the musket at her head. Sandoval steps back-- clearly disturbed.

Cortes locks eyes with Jaramillo.

CORTES
I no longer need her.

Jaramillo shoves the musket into Cortes' hands-- knows he's beaten-- his words are quiet-- his eyes on Mali.

JARAMILLO
Hold the palace until you can return with assets from Veracruz. Take hostages. Royal ones. Just don't hurt her.

CORTES
We'll return together with a thousand Spaniards. You'll take the city's defenses apart then.

Jaramillo's gaze darts to Mali, now in Sandoval's embrace.

CORTES
There are no choices here.

Jaramillo slams Cortes aside, then strides away CALLING OUT to Soldiers.

JARAMILLO
We need ten-- now!

**EXT. WARRIOR'S BARRACKS - DAY**

Cuauhtemoc and at least FIFTY GHOST WARRIORS race through an expansive open air gallery filled with thousands of AZTEC WARRIORS TRAINING. By the time they reach the gates-- they are five hundred STRONG.

**INT. MONCTEZUMA'S PALACE - GREAT HALL - DAY**

Frightened Nobles are taken captive by 20 Spanish Soldiers. Jaramillo rushes towards a hall.

**INT. MONCTEZUMA'S PALACE - HALLWAY - FOLLOWING**

Cortes runs down a narrow hallway, checking every room. 10 Soldiers and Alvarado shadow him, muskets primed and ready. Cortes kicks open a door.

**INT. MONCTEZUMA'S PALACE - DAY**

Monctezuma, stares off the balcony into the night and startles as Cortes busts through the door, Alvarado right behind him. Monctezuma's wives and children rush to huddle in the corner.

Young Sandoval pushes in with Mali as:

CORTES
(straight to Monctezuma)
Didn't anyone ever you tell you--
you can't kill a god?!

Jaramillo strides straight to the balcony; peers over.

POV JARAMILLO: 500 Aztec Warriors surround the palace with Cuauhtemoc-- they've taken 20 'outside' Spanish Soldiers. Cuauhtemoc grabs a CAPTIVE SOLDIER and quickly opens the small of his neck; the Soldier staggers, bleeding out. Grabs another-- smiling up to Jaramillo.

JARAMILLO
(to Cortes)
Cuauhtemoc-- (nods to Monctezuma)
show him.

Cortes boldly kick-pushes Monctezuma to the balcony.

POV JARMILLO: Cuauhtemoc sees Monctezuma. Stunned, he reluctantly releases the SECOND SOLDIER.

Cortes pushes Monctezuma back inside-- glances to Alvarado's blistered hand.

CORTES
Give me your camisa.

Jaramillo's eyes widen at the sight of it:

JARAMILLO
What-- no--

CORTES
--give it to me!

Alvarado hesitates, shirt off--

JARAMILLO
Don’t do it, Hernan.

--Cortes snatches the shirt from Alvarado with the tip of his dagger-- forces Monctezuma to the ground-- drops it into Monctezuma’s face and rubs it in with booted foot.

JARAMILLO
(to Monctezuma)
The shirt has a sickness in it, now it’s in you. You leave this palace, you murder your entire city and anyone you touch.

Mali GASPS-- fights against Sandoval; can’t escape. Alvarado studies his hand in horror-- Cortes’ watches Jaramillo speak to Monctezuma in shock:

JARAMILLO
You can’t touch your children-- your wives-- you can never touch them again.

Cortes points a finger in Jaramillo’s face.

CORTES
He speaks our language?
(hot anger)
You met with him?!

Jaramillo is silent; his eyes locked on Monctezuma’s.

CORTES
Ahhh-- I warned you--

Cortes EXHALES in derision and BACK HANDS Jaramillo. He grabs Mali; steps up to the balcony.

**EXT. COURTYARD BELOW - CONTINUOUS**

Cuauhtemoc and his surrounding 500 listen to Mali SPEAK:

MALI
(repeating Cortes’ words in Nahuatl)
Your city is under Spanish command. 200 nobles and your royals are now hostages. Any Spaniard is harmed in this man’s absence-- the nobles first-- and then the royals-- will be executed.

Cuauhtemoc’s blood-shot eyes glare at Cortes.

**INT. MONCTEZUMA'S PALACE - CONTINUOUS**

Jaramillo side bars Young Sandoval from Alvarado's hearing:

JARAMILLO
Leave with us. Who ever stays won't survive. Cortes knows it, he's just buying time to escape.

YOUNG SANDOVAL
Why are you telling me this?

JARAMILLO
Because I need you under my order and the men trust you. Because I cut a deal with the devil and we're going back to Veracruz-- returning with 1000 trained men.
(off his stunned expression)
Without them, Cortes will lose everything.

YOUNG SANDOVAL
What will you lose?

Jaramillo glances to Mali struggling in Cortes' grip.

JARAMILLO
What do you think?

YOUNG SANDOVAL
What makes you think I'd obey you over him? What makes you think any of us would?

Cortes approaches-- wrangling Mali.

CORTES
Sandoval-- you stay and hold the palace.

Sandoval's gaze darts to Jaramillo's.

JARMILLO
No. I need him fifty miles out.
(off Cortes' expression)
We have 25,000 Tlaxcalans who might be dead within the month. These people have no immunity.
(a beat)
I need them to build ships-- before we loose them. Sandoval is a Mariner.

CORTES
Ships?
(it hits him)
Well done.

JARMILLO
(simmering anger)
I give you victory-- Mali and I are free. With supplies, horses, twenty five men and enough gold to take us back to Spain-- enough to last ten lifetimes.

Cortes holds Mali tighter.

CORTES
Is that all?

JARMILLO
Sandoval's my witness.

Jaramillo quickly glances over the balcony-- grabs Mali from Cortes, unties her, heads to the door with Sandoval following.

SANDOVAL
(in thanks)
I'm not a Mariner, Sir.

Alvarado leans against the wall; emotionally spent. Cortes approaches him:

CORTES
The palace is yours-- hold it for my return. You'll be rewarded richly.

ALVARADO
(looks at his hands)
Will I survive?

CORTES
You're the most experienced officer I have. You must survive. For the sake of the fifty in your care.

Cortes is out the door.

**EXT. MONCTEZUMA'S PALACE - DAY**

Cortes, Jaramillo, Mali and Sandoval walk past Cuauhtemoc and Aztec Warriors.

The Soldiers are released now-- leveling muskets at them. Cortes speaks quietly with MEN IN CHARGE, Jaramillo watches, soul sickened.

Sandoval lifts Mali onto a horse and mounts his own as Cortes comes face to face with Jaramillo (as Sandoval and Mali listen.)

JARAMILLO
You know they're all dead men.

CORTES
It had to be done-- we're alive.

Cortes mounts up and rides out across the bridge. Jaramillo swings up on a horse-- Mali and Sandoval ride out with him.

**EXT. CROSSING THE SNAKE MOUNTAINS - FOLLOWING - DAY**

The Caravan travels slowly through panoramic mountain terrain; rough going. Mali rides double with Jaramillo; they speak quietly passing the time. She hugs herself closer to him-- nods off against his back.

An armed SOLDIER rides a horse following them. Jaramillo glances back-- shoots him a dirty look.

**EXT. RAIN FOREST ROAD - FOLLOWING - NIGHT**

A stern faced Jaramillo rides next to Cortes' wagon; war dogs trail behind-- chain collars JINGLING. Behind them, a mounted SOLDIER follows Jaramillo.

INSIDE: A swinging lantern illuminates Cortes sitting with Mali. Stone faced, she dutifully repeats Nahuatl words from a scroll; language lessons. Cortes pronounces each word carefully-- taking notes on parchment with a quill.

Mali's eyes continuously glance out the window to Jaramillo.

**EXT. JUNGLE CARAVAN CAMP - NIGHT**

Jaramillo sits under a tree, open journal in hand, watching Mali, wrapped in a serape, sleeping peacefully on the ground.

PULL OUT TO REVEAL: TWO SOLDIERS stand guard over Jaramillo, muskets in hand.

**EXT. RAINFOREST ROAD - DAY**

Jaramillo and Cortes ride side by side. Cortes reads from Jaramillo's journal. He's almost forgiving:

CORTES
I have only seen things like this in books. You've given me a great gift. I'm grateful. And you've given Captain Sandoval his orders?

Jaramillo's cold glare focuses hard on Cortes. He can't help it, he taunts the man he's come to hate but knows well.

JARAMILLO
What of the 1000 fighting men and 300 mariners you need from Veracruz? You think your politician's babble will get you out of a court marshal?

CORTES
The Cholulan gold will buy what ever I need-- whomever I need.

JARAMILLO
Saenz didn't make it and you think the gold did. Nice your delusional nature allows for such-- positive thinking.

CORTES
30 trained men and muskets against savages with little wooden clubs? It made it.

JARAMILLO
I like seeing you like this, Hernan.

CORTES
And how is that?

JARAMILLO
(hissed)
Afraid.

**TIME PASSES AS**

THE SUN SETS AND RISES; the caravan forges onwards, then SHOUTING in the distance-- so faint we think it imagined.

A TRACKER rides furiously towards the caravan and skids to a stop at: Cortes rides shotgun along the supply lines. Jaramillo rides quickly to him-- meeting the arriving Tracker.

TRACKER
Sir! Governor Velasquez is sending a search party out. They fear some sort of treachery is afoot with your long absence. Young Velasquez has sent me ahead to inform.

CORTES
Have a meal with the men and then deliver a message.
(a beat)
I'm returning and look forward to the negotiations. We're alive and well.

A beat.

TRACKER
They're calling for your arrest, Sir.

CORTES
What of the Cholulan gold?

TRACKER
Captain Saenz was raided-- they say they came as ghosts-- they skinned him alive, Sir.

CORTES
Yes, but the gold-- it made it back with the other 30?

TRACKER
Only two survived. And one was missing half his fingers. There was no gold.

Cortes' has a sickened look on his face. Jaramillo can't help it-- it's so terrible he smiles-- just shaking his head.

CORTES
Wipe that smile off your face, Captain. If I don't survive their interrogations-- we'll both face a firing squad.

Jaramillo simply wheels his horse around and rides to the wagon.

**EXT. CORTES' WAGON - DAY**

Jaramillo knocks on the closed window; Mali opens it.

JARAMILLO
Why don't you come and ride with me?

She smiles and exits-- he lifts her up behind him-- he gallops into--

**AN OPEN EXPANSE**

--and pulls up. They sit the horse, Jaramillo gazing ahead into the vastness of the vista:

JARAMILLO
We could just keep going-- right now. But I think of the child and you-- there's a court marshal waiting for me in Veracruz. I think I can beat it and get you to Spain but--

She buries her face into his strong back.

JARAMILLO
Just when I think I've beaten him, he kicks me in the gut!

She places his hand on her flat belly; a validation of the child hiding within her.

MALI
I love you like the sun.

A muscle in his jaw ticks-- he kicks the horse into a cantor towards the caravan.

**EXT. ARRIVAL VERACRUZ - DAY**

The caravan snakes down a grassy hill into Veracruz: An enormous fort has sprung up where once there were only camps. Cortes' villa is now built; it is majestic.

A travel tired Cortes rides alone-- weary eyed until it comes into view: *He has never seen it until now.*

A quick intake of breath, a slow awe struck smile-- but only for a moment until his line of sight moves to: Cortes studies an armada of Caravel ships.

*The bay is choked with them-- ominous.*

Cortes gallops his horse to Jaramillo who rides near the wagon. They study the ships:

CORTES
Take no chances, you now have something to lose.
(a beat)
She'll be nothing but a bitch amongst dogs. Do well.

And Cortes is already riding out ahead, meeting up with approaching RIDERS. He dismounts and is instantly put into iron cuffs and kicked to the ground. TWO MORE RIDERS rush Jaramillo; he dismounts and is also put into iron cuffs.

**INT. FORT VERACRUZ - HEADQUARTERS - DAY**

Cortes and Jaramillo are presented to PANFILO NAVAEREZ. Little John (Velasquez) approaches Cortes:

LITTLE JOHN
I'm sorry, Captain General-- Captain Jaramillo. Saenz didn't make it back.

Little John leaves quickly. Panfilo sits behind a mahogany desk, full of authority.

PANFILO
I hear you thought to buy the governor of Cuba with gold.

CORTES
I thought to buy you with gold.

Panfilo puts his feet up, lights a Cuban cigar.

PANFILO
You exceeded orders and stole the governor's ships-- then vandalized them. You've insulted your king. I don't have to tell you what the penalty is.

Peruses Jaramillo's disheveled appearance.

PANFILO
Captain Jaramillo, you're a man of the sword. You're no stranger to the rules of conquest.

JARAMILLO
No, Sir.

PANFILO
But whores of war always follow mad men, don't they? You think he'd make you general? Of the army he'd need to fight off to Spain's invasion?

JARAMILLO
I know he would have.

PANFILO
Spain owns the shirt on your back. It owns the land beneath your feet. You're both going to be looking down the barrels of 20 muskets, you know that?

CORTES
I've got 12 cannons out there somewhere and men who've all seen what I have. They're in charge of 25,000 Indians who could take Veracruz in a second. I hold a city hostage so full of gold, I could not only buy Spain-- I could buy England. Panfilo, you're an imbecile if you follow through with this.

PANFILO
I'm intrigued. But unlike you, I take orders, I don't give them-- or defy them.

JARAMILLO
Then, look the other way when we leave with the 1400 soldiers you just brought in.

Panfilo LAUGHS.

PANFILO
Oh, of course I will.

Jaramillo digs into a pocket and slides an emerald crocodile egg across the desk. Cortes' eyes go wide.

JARAMILLO
But if you'd rather remain a servant to a governor who grovels to a king. Be my guest.

Panfilo stirs a cup of foaming chocolate-- slides a palm over the emerald.

PANFILO
Cortes, I told your wife that she'd be widowed within a fortnight. She'll be pleased to see you.

CORTES
My wife?

PANFILO
Remember her? The woman who would launch a thous-- an expedition?
(off Cortes' expression)
When the governor's sister is put on one of my ships, I don't ask why.

Panfilo pushes out from his chair; unlocks Cortes' iron cuffs, then Jaramillo's. He goes to the window and gazes out:

PANFILO
You have over two thousand men to give orders to, Captain General. After tomorrow, you won't see me again.

THROUGH THE WINDOW: The Caravel armada at sea.

Jaramillo walks out the door without a word--

PANFILO
Get moving-- before anyone else gets involved.

--Cortes nods to Panfilo and KICK-SLAMS the door behind him.

**EXT. FORT VERACRUZ - DAY**

Jaramillo strides towards the wagon, cutting through SOLDIERS tending horses, unloading supplies. Cortes comes up on him fast, TWO SOLDIERS flanking him.

CORTES
Take him to the barracks and lock him up.

JARAMILLO
DAMN YOU, HERNAN!
(struggles)
Honor your word! For once in your life, honor your God damned word!

**EXT. MONCTEZUMA'S PALACE - NIGHT**

Alvarado peeks out a palace open air window; he's terrified.

BELOW: Hundreds of AZTEC PEOPLE riot.

He turns back to TEN WAR TORN SOLDIERS sitting around a pile of golden icons-- dividing them up.

The ANGRY SHOUTING VOICES are so loud, they can barely hear above it:

ALVARADO
Listen to them out there!

Suddenly, a burning arrow zings in from the window; ignites billowing cotton drapes.

**INT. CORTES' VILLA - NIGHT**

CATALINA CORTES sits quietly by a CRACKLING fire reading the Bible, a rosary wrapped around her fragile wrist.

She's a plain young thing, dressed in black taffeta with a high stiff collar like her persona.

The room is lavishly appointed and overlooks the sea. But she's not enjoying it; she's incapable of that.

Cortes is lost in thought, a man unwinding and under pressure, gazing out-- feet up on the table, drinking Aguardiente; Spanish brandy.

His vision focuses on his armor, his helmet and plume, personal weapons, all sitting silent in the hall.

Then it shifts to a guest house in the garden near the sea. He studies Catalina and SLURS:

CORTES
What does the good book say about submitting to your husband?

She doesn't look up.

CATALINA
You left just hours after our wedding vows, Sir. We barely had time--

CORTES
--it's no secret why I married you.

CATALINA
They say you travel with a woman?

He glares at her--

CORTES
She's just a savage. Jaramillo uses her. He's a savage now too.

--sets the Brandy snifter down.

CORTES
Come here, Senora Velasquez de Cortes.

CATALINA
Have you no respect?

He shrugs, staggers towards her-- then releases the pins from her tightly bound hair.

CORTES
Come now, we've done this before-- once. Don't you think it's time to do it again?

She grips her rosary and rushes up a grand staircase, weighted down by burdensome petticoats.

CATALINA
I will write my brother (Governor Velasquez) and tell him to make a widow of me in truth!

He snatches the Aguardiente and strides out the front door-- passes by the picture window, heading towards:

**INT. GUEST HOUSE - NIGHT**

Cortes busts in-- bottle clenched-- fire in his eyes. Mali, wet hair, smelling of flowers; Cortes INHALES. She backs up-- all the way to the other side of the room.

MALI
Where's Captain Jaramillo?

He reaches out, slowly, step by step coming towards her:

CORTES
Why are your people so different? Why do you live so freely? Make love under the stars?
(MORE)

CORTES (CONT'D)
Then butcher each other-- wear the skins of your enemies. I want to know-- I want to know you better-- I need to know-- can't you just love me a little?

MALI
--leave me alone.

And he's on her.

CORTES
I'll leave you when I'm done.

She snatches the dagger from his belt-- snugs it to his throat.

MALI
You want to know why we wear the skins of our enemies? To know them better. You sure you want to know me better?

A tiny smile plays on his lips; knife at his throat.

CORTES
Maybe.

And BAM! He snap-grabs her arm and SMASHES a fist into her cheekbone, she goes down cold.

**INT. FORT VERACRUZ - BARRACKS - NIGHT**

Jaramillo plays dice with his captors; SOLDIERS. But he's not present-- his mind is somewhere else. Someone rolls, shakes and pounds the die cup; someone wins-- someone pays up-- Jaramillo doesn't care. He pushes out from the table, wanders to the window; gazes out.

**EXT. GUEST HOUSE - NIGHT**

Mali staggers from the guest house; beaten, stumbling to the sea-- then standing knee deep in the waves-- frantically cleansing the private parts of her body.

We see Catalina Cortes run towards her from the villa in the windy night.

**INT. FORT VERACRUZ - BARRACKS - NIGHT**

Little John Velasquez walks in; pale, disconcerted.

LITTLE JOHN
Captain Jaramillo. I need a word.

Jaramillo follows Little John Velasquez out the door into the barracks courtyard-- an enclosed and locked area.

**EXT. FORT VERACRUZ - BARRACKS - NIGHT**

LITTLE JOHN
You're to be married this night.

JARAMILLO
What are you talking about?
(off John's expression)
Speak man!

Jaramillo SLAMS Little John against the wall; holds him there:

LITTLE JOHN
The Nahua woman's been compromised and beaten.

JARAMILLO
Mali?

LITTLE JOHN
Cortes has ordered the ceremony himself.
(ashamed)
He fears my Aunt Catalina will give the news to my uncle the Governor, that she's been personally insulted. An insult to her is an insult to him. So, Cortes accuses you.

Jaramillo rushes the gates; they're locked.

**INT. MONCTEZUMA'S PALACE - NIGHT**

A sweating, blistered Alvarado is crazed with fear as he SHOUTS:

ALVARADO
BRING THE GOLD-- GET OUT!

Alvarado and the Ten Soldiers rush through palace hallways-- a maze of rooms and galleries-- lost, loaded down with gold.

**EXT. MONCTEZUMA'S PALACE - COURTYARD - FOLLOWING**

Alvarado breaks through a side gate into a courtyard, the Soldiers sneaking behind him--

--WALKING OVER THE BODIES OF 200 NOBLES. The nobles have been shot execution style, each with the backs of their heads blown off. The group exits into:

**EXT. MONCTEZUMA'S PALACE - GARDEN - FOLLOWING**

Alvarado and the Soldiers stealthily cut through a staggering display of planters filled with fresh herbs and flowers.

Everywhere are the BODIES of SPANISH SOLDIERS; hacked to pieces-- arrows in backs-- gruesome bludgeon wounds.

**INT. MONCTEZUMA'S PALACE - OBSERVATORY - NIGHT**

High atop a stone observatory under the starry sky: Cuauhtemoc bolts from the shadows with a bow and arrow; leans out and lets the arrow fly.

**EXT. MONCTEZUMA'S PALACE - GARDEN - NIGHT**

The arrow embeds into a SOLDIER.

Alvarado makes a break towards the street and distant bridge shining with torches. The remaining nine men follow him desperately. But the gold is slowing them down.

ANOTHER ARROW whizzes past Alvarado. He throws his booty into a canal, then sprints towards the distant bridge.

**INT. VILLA CHAPEL - NIGHT**

A CATHOLIC PRIEST waits with Jaramillo as Little John Velasquez enters supporting a staggering Mali; lip split and cheekbone swollen horribly. She's so weak she can barely stand.

Jaramillo rushes to her-- a moment as he searches her face. There is a hidden joy, though bittersweet. He goes down on one knee, head bowed-- and she gently touches it.

**EXT. TENOCHTITLAN - STREETS - NIGHT**

Alvarado and the nine are crossing canals, dropping more burdensome gold, scrambling for their lives as MORE ARROWS WHIZ through the air from no where-- killing three more men.

**INT. VILLA CHAPEL - NIGHT**

The Priest performs a Catholic marriage with high mass. Jaramillo assists Mali to remain standing.

**EXT. BRIDGE TO TENOCHTITLAN - NIGHT**

Alvarado and the six-- tossing the last of their gold into the lake waters, sprinting down the bridge; Ghost Warriors now in pursuit.

**INT. VILLA CHAPEL - NIGHT**

The priest gives two candles to Mali and Jaramillo, they light a single candle together.

**EXT. BRIDGE TO TENOCHTITLAN - NIGHT**

Six men and Alvarado-- almost to the end of the bridge. A FLURRY OF ARROWS WHIZ INTO THEM-- leaving Alvarado and ONE MAN stumbling towards the jungle.

Cuauhtemoc watches; he CRIES OUT-- fist pumping in rage. He turns back to the red and blue pyramid in the distance, his eyes narrow.

WE RACE TOWARDS IT:

**EXT. TEMPLE OF THE SUN AND RAIN - NIGHT**

SICKENED (SMALL POXED) AZTEC PEOPLE climb the many steps upwards in reverent worship, desperately praying for help from their gods.

Frightening yet hopeful PRIESTS nail a struggling SPANISH SOLIDER against the wall upside down; opening his neck and draining the blood into cups-- pouring it over each other’s heads and bodies-- CHANTING-- PRAYING.

**INT. VILLA CHAPEL - NIGHT**

The Catholic Priest makes the sign of the cross-- Jaramillo lifts the weakened Mali into his arms and carefully carries her out. And WHISPERS:

JARAMILLO
I love you.

**EXT. BRIDGE TO TENOCHTITLAN - NIGHT**

Cuauhtemoc SHOUTS an order-- WARRIORS torch the bridge.

PULL UP FROM A BIRDS EYE VIEW: ALL FOUR BRIDGES GO UP IN FLAMES.

**EXT. VILLA CHAPEL - NIGHT**

FROM A BIRD'S EYE VIEW: Jaramillo carries a shivering Mali through the villa grounds; Cortes' home brightly lit exteriorly with torches. Little John Velasquez escorts them to the guest house, opens the door and leaves.

**INT. GUEST HOUSE - NIGHT**

Jaramillo lays Mali on the bed, covers her gently and sinks into a chair. She smiles weakly then curls up within a fevered sleep.

He watches her, heart breaking, exhausted-- his hand moves instinctively to his hip-- no scabbard, no sword, no dagger.

Studies a spider high in a rafter spinning a web and WHISPERS to himself:

JARAMILLO
Just wait, Juan. Wait for it.

FOOTSTEPS-- someone's coming. Cortes opens the door; Jaramillo leaps up. Sees the TWO SOLDIERS flanking Cortes--

**EXT. GUEST HOUSE - NIGHT**

--the last thing we see FROM A DISTANCE is a combative Jaramillo being dragged from the guest house by the Two Soldiers.

Wild eyed and beyond any control-- WE CANNOT HEAR IT but he's SHOUTING, BEGGING, a man in the grips of pure rage.

**INT. CORTES' VILLA - SUNRISE**

We follow a feral cat skittering through the parlor, into the foyer. It skirts around the hem of a black taffeta dress at the foot of the grand staircase-- then dashes up.

MOVE SLOWLY BACK DOWN THE STAIRS TO FIND: Catalina Cortes, torn black taffeta dress-- sitting on the bottom stair-- hair mussed-- quietly weeping.

**EXT. TENOCHTITLAN - DAY**

The bridges are long gone-- the city is an isolated island. Canoes move freely delivering fresh produce from the floating markets. PEOPLE fish in the lake.

**EXT. MONCTEZUMA'S PALACE - DAY**

Angry 'poxed' PEOPLE gather at the palace walls; SHOUTING.

**INT. MONCTEZUMA'S PALACE - FISH AND BIRD POOLS - DAY**

The SOUNDS of faint SHOUTING from outside.

From a distance, Monctezuma wrapped and concealed in linen, watches Albino Nahuatl sitting at the edge of a long rectangular indoor pool.

Albino Nahuatl shows Monctezuma's LITTLE SON how to fish with a net and pole. The boy fishes out wriggling shrimp.

Monctezuma throws corn to the geese rooting in the watercress.

Monctezuma's LITTLE DAUGHTER, finds a nest of eggs. Albino Nahuatl rewards her with an embrace-- cracking open a raw egg and drinking it, yoke dribbling down his chest.

Cuauhtemoc, dressed finely, approaches quietly; squats down-- Monctezuma moves away from him.

CUAUHTEMOC
How are you feeling, father?

Monctezuma stares at his small children.

MONCTEZUMA
I've been dreaming in the house of the eagles.

CUAUHTEMOC
Who did you dream?

MONCTEZUMA
The Nahuatl woman. Her child fights to survive within her.

CUAUHTEMOC
There will be blood soon. The ugly one crosses the snake mountains.

A beat of consideration:

MONCTEZUMA
Bring me the woman.

**EXT. RAIN FOREST ROAD - DAY**

Jaramillo is tied to his saddle, his horse is led behind a CAVALRYMAN within the moving caravan. He's dirty, his clothing is tattered and a beard has grown with weeks of neglect. Cortes rides up as the caravan comes to a halt.

CORTES
We're here, thank God-- you're starting to smell like one of my dogs.

Jaramillo turns to Cortes with silent tears of frustration. Cortes is taken off guard-- never in his life has he seen Jaramillo break and Jaramillo is a man stoically breaking.

JARAMILLO
You never told me-- you never told me why. Why you hurt her, why you didn't just let us go when I paid Panfilo? You had the directives-- the resources-- everything! And here we are-- why?

CORTES
And here we are.
(a beat)
You are the Sword of Cortes, the man who takes down a nation.

JARAMILLO
This evil will catch you one day.

CORTES
Then, I will move faster than evil.

Cortes turns to the Cavalryman leading Jaramillo's horse:

CORTES
Cut him loose.

SHOUT OUTS as Young Sandoval arrives with a handful of SOLDIERS.

The Cortes Wagon door opens and Mali step out heavy with child. Sandoval is shocked but smiles respectfully at her.

Cortes rides up:

YOUNG SANDOVAL
Welcome, Captain General. To my humble abode.

CORTES
(warm)
Sandoval-- you better have good news for me.

YOUNG SANDOVAL
Was that Captain Jaramillo?

CORTES
Lead the way, I've been waiting a lifetime for this.

Sandoval glances back, puzzled, as he leads the way towards a hill crest.

BELOW: A small valley surrounded by high mountains and the realization of Jaramillo's battle plans:

2 Brigantines float in a man made canal, fed by a river with a newly constructed dam. A stunning feat of engineering in the middle of no-where.

YOUNG SANDOVAL
It wasn't easy, but once we had the canal filled-- well, the ships are seaworthy, Sir, no doubt about it.

Thousands of TLAXCALANS work under the supervision of Spanish SOLDIERS. They dismantle MANY ships, laboring with planks, masts and hulls.

YOUNG SANDOVAL
The pox took a good fifteen thousand. But the rest pulled through and here we are, Sir.

Sandoval is proud.

YOUNG SANDOVAL
We've got 11 dismantled. The Tlaxcalans are transporting them now-- it's about 30 miles to tenochtitlan. But straight up and down. No picnic.

CORTES
Captain Jaramillo chose a good location.

YOUNG SANDOVAL
He's a brilliant tactician, if I don't say so myself. Haven't seen a single hostile soul, not once.

Cortes simply stares at the miracle and catches a hint of craftiness in Young Sandoval.

YOUNG SANDOVAL
I'd like to thank the Captain, if you don't mind.

CORTES
The Captain is under watch.

YOUNG SANDOVAL
What did he do this time, Sir?

Cortes continues to gaze on the valley as the sun goes down; lost in his dream. Sandoval waits a moment and leaves.

**EXT. WATERFALL - NIGHT**

Mali stares upward to the heavens; the comet is enormous. She protectively hugs folded, men's clothing to her chest; an obsidian blade and ginger flowers gripped in her hands.

There is an eerie stillness surrounding her. Then, a hummingbird comes to hover before her eyes.

*"They are the souls of dead warriors come to warn us."*

MALI
No-- go away. I don't see you.

It darts away-- and Jaramillo's rushing down the trail to towards her.

She smiles brilliantly as he goes to his knees, touching his palm to her rounded belly; leaning his forehead against it.

Without words, she leads him towards the waterfall; gently peels his filthy shirt away, guiding him into the water.

He's like a warrior returning from battle; a once deadly man gone fragile.

MALI
Just dream with me, Juan, dream--

Washing him with crushed ginger flowers, shaving his beard with the blade gently-- his tired eyes closing.

MALI
--our child is born. Then another. We grow old with our children at our feet. Do you see it?

She leans him back, running her hands through his wet hair. His eyes snap open-- a thought pushes through:

JARAMILLO
We're in Tlaxcalan territory.

MALI
Shhh-- shall I tell you how the dream ends?

Trying to return her to reality, he gently pulls away:

JARAMILLO
--if I know the end, I might not fight as hard.

And he's rising up; listening. Suddenly, SHOUTS come from the dimness of the jungle.

SOLDIERS (O.S.)
It's captain Alvarado! Alvarado's here!

And he's SPLASHING out, sliding into breeches-- up the trail.

**EXT. CORTES' WAGON - NIGHT**

Alvarado is led in by the surviving Soldier, tied down to his horse. The Soldier cuts the ties, he falls to the ground; his face is covered in blisters.

Jaramillo rushes in-- stands over him:

JARAMILLO
Where's the rest of the men?

ALVARADO
Dead. We looted a temple--

JARAMILLO
--you left the palace?

ALVARADO
The people rioted-- we executed the nobles.

JARAMILLO
And Monctezuma? Cuauhtemoc?

ALVARADO
Alive-- until the pox gets ‘em.

Jaramillo disarms the Soldier’s short sword and drives it into Alvarado’s chest-- boots it down for the finish.

Turns to see the Soldier running for his life.

Cortes rushes in-- Jaramillo realizes they’re alone-- looks at him like a wolf about to spring--

--Cortes takes a step back-- Jaramillo SLAMS into him. They FALL HARD-- backwards.

**AT THE WATERFALL**

Mali makes her way up the trail-- she can HEAR the fighting. From behind her, Cuauhtemoc’s white ash face appears, then 10 more ghostly white faces appear within the jungle overgrowth.

She freezes as a strong hand covers her mouth, pulling her into the darkness-- her shawl falls from her shoulders. She CRIES OUT but no one can hear her.

**AT CORTES’ WAGON**

A knot of gathering Soldiers SHOUT OUT encouragement, others are too stunned to speak. Cortes rolls out from under Jaramillo’s brutal assault.

Suddenly someone slides a steel sword into Jaramillo’s view. He scrambles to it, turns back to find Cortes is double armed; a right handed short sword and left handed dagger.

CORTES
Okay, Juan, let’s go--

Cortes strikes-- a bleeding gash in Jaramillo's shoulder, weakening his sword arm. Jaramillo parries against Cortes' double arching attack.

It's unnerving-- Cortes' graceful, honed attack sends Jaramillo back stepping in a flurry of slashing motions.

Finally Jaramillo's in trouble-- cornered at the wagon. With the flip of a wrist, Cortes razor-slides Jaramillo's sword from his grip with his own-- it arcs and SLAPS to the dirt.

CORTES
Men like you can only stand on the edge of greatness--

Jarmillo strikes, leg sweeping under Cortes, laying him out and pinning him down-- squeezing sword and dagger from his fists-- snatching the dagger-- tip touching Cortes' throat.

WHISPERS of awe break out amongst the spectating Soldiers.

JARAMILLO
Perhaps we stand there to keep men like you from falling off.

Sandoval pushes through-- tosses a rope to Jaramillo. Jaramillo ties up Cortes.

YOUNG SANDOVAL
What are you going to do with him?

JARAMILLO
Send him to the governor.

YOUNG SANDOVAL
I asked him what you did to warrant that charge of treason.

JARAMILLO
What was his answer?

YOUNG SANDOVAL
He didn't have one. Where is the Nahuatl woman? I noted she was with child--

Jaramillo stares at Sandoval a beat and it hits him. He races desperately down--

**THE TRAIL**

JARMILLO
Mali!

**AT THE WATERFALL**

Stops cold-- sees the knife and his own discarded clothing-- then the shawl.

JARAMILLO
MALI!!!

**EXT. JUNGLE - NIGHT**

Jaramillo and SOLDIERS rush through dense forest with torches; BARKING MASTIFF'S track a scent. Rain pit-pats on leaves, then falls hard. Suddenly, the dogs lose the scent.

Jaramillo squeezes his eyes closed-- gripping the shawl. He looks upwards to the dark, THUNDERING cloud filled skies.

JARAMILLO
God damn you all to hell!

**EXT. CARAVAN CAMP - NIGHT**

Jaramillo strides through the muddied camp, rain comes down in torrents; Sandoval falls in line with him.

JARAMILLO
We're taking the city.

YOUNG SANDOVAL
Without the Captain General--

JARAMILLO
--we'll trade him. That's what they want.
(off Sandoval's horrified expression)
Monctezuma will be overthrown for what Alvarado's done-- seen as weak. He has to kill something.

YOUNG SANDOVAL
They'll cut out the Captain General's heart!

JARAMILLO
They can cut it out and feed it to jackals for all I care.

A stunned Sandoval slows-- Jaramillo keep going.

JARMILLO
Fall in line, Sandoval-- we've got work to do.

Sandoval quickens his pace.

**EXT. VALLEY - CANAL AND DAM - DAY**

Cloudy skies; dry lightening zig-zags across mountain peaks.

The Brigantines are gone from the canal. A THOUSAND SOLDIERS and CALVARY exit the valley-- Sandoval is in his glory as he SHOUTS orders to CAPTAINS and REGIMENTS.

IN THE DISTANCE: TLAXCALAN LABORERS carry planks and hulls up a treacherous mountain trail.

No one seems to notice that Cortes is tied to his horse riding next to Jaramillo.

**INT. MONCTEZUMA'S QUARTERS - NIGHT**

Pouring tropical rain and THUNDER outside the open air balcony. Blood on cotton sheets. Mali's breaths come fast; her belly rounded and high-- perspiration glistens on her skin-- she CRIES OUT.

Monctezuma's Wives surround her-- one holds a tray of sharp blades. They speak in NAHUATL.

WIFE 1
What are you doing?

WIFE 2
(whispered)
The child is large.

WIFE 3
Call a priest.

WIFE 2
No!

WIFE 1
Let the her die. She's a traitor to all Nahuatls.

WIFE 2
But the child is not.

Mali speaks in a pleading HUSH:

MALI
Please, save the child.

The Woman with the tray slowly approaches the bedside.

**EXT. MONCTEZUMA'S PALACE - OBSERVATORY - DAY**

A linen covered Monctezuma watches from the domed, limestone observatory.

IN THE DISTANCE: Spanish SOLDIERS and TLAXCALANS assemble the 50 foot Brigantines at water's edge.

Many campfires are blazing and smoking within the massive Spanish camp lining the shore.

But the lake is quiet-- devoid of life, devoid of canoes and devoid of floating markets.

BELOW: PEOPLE throw rocks at the palace walls; MANY are covered with blistering Small Pox.

**EXT. LAKE SIDE CAMP - NIGHT**

SOLDIERS prepare and load cross bows with arrows, mend armor, clean muskets, sharpen personal weapons.

TLAXCALANS handle war dogs; now proud trainers. Horses are fed and watered and supplies are in movement between camps.

AT WATER'S EDGE: Weapon's stock piles and men dressed for battle are loaded onto the first completed ships. Other Brigantines are pushed by laboring Tlaxcalans-- they slide off their dry docks into the lake.

**INT. CORTES' WAGON - NIGHT**

Dark and closed in with nothing but a candle. Cortes waits, sitting in silence with his Groom. He's ready in his traditional Spanish armor, helmet and plume but something's missing; weapons.

Jaramillo BUSTS in-- full battle regalia but different; a short sword in his scabbard, knives in his belt, light chain armor with quilted vest-- no helmet and plume here.

JARAMILLO
Let's go. It's time.

The Groom WHISPERS a prayer and crosses himself.

**EXT. CORTES' WAGON - NIGHT**

Jaramillo ties Cortes' hands in his lap; he's mounted onto his horse. Jaramillo rides out leading him.

Cortes notes Jaramillo's lack of armor.

CORTES
You'll need more than that ropa de mierda to survive this one.

JARAMILLO
Who says I'll survive.

**EXT. LAKE SIDE CAMP - FOLLOWING**

They pass through the preparations and Cortes sees the floating ships; he's star struck:

CORTES
In the name of God-- you did it. By morning the city is ours. Untie me-- let me fight at your side.

Jaramillo does not respond.

CORTES
You kept me alive for a reason-- you can't murder a brother.
(a beat)
Over a woman.

Jaramillo burns to kill this man-- he can't hold it in, doesn't even try; he erupts:

JARAMILLO
I kept you alive so I could trade you! FOR A WOMAN!

The look on Cortes' face is telling; odd, but there's pain in it. Jaramillo SWATS Cortes' horse's flank-- it rushes up the plank. Alvarado receives Cortes at the top.

**EXT. WATER'S EDGE - NIGHT**

Jaramillo rides a few feet into the water and stares at Tenochtitlan in the distance.

JARAMILLO
(whispered)
Please be alive.

He pulls Mali's shawl from his saddle pack and winds it around his neck.

**INT. MONCTEZUMA'S QUARTERS - NIGHT**

Monctezuma listens to the SOUNDS of Mali's birthing. He goes to the balcony and peeks out. It's blanketed with stones-- one flies in-- hits him.

IN THE STREET BELOW: The angry, poxed MOB pushes against palace walls.

**INT. MONCTEZUMA'S PALACE - HOUSE OF THE EAGLES - NIGHT**

Monctezuma enters the vacuous gallery unnoticed in his linen bandages. He watches WARRIORS paint themselves ceremonially in bright colors. He steps out into:

**EXT. MONCTEZUMA'S PALACE - WARRIOR'S BARRACKS - NIGHT**

THOUSANDS of Aztec INFANTRY line up at the enormous gate. Cuauhtemoc approaches Monctezuma. Monctezuma cannot embrace him but Cuauhtemoc doesn't care. He pulls his father into a strong embrace.

Cuauhtemoc holds him a moment alone, then Monctezuma returns it with intensity-- shoulders shaking with emotion.

The gate opens and warriors rush out SHOUTING BATTLE CRIES. Cuauhtemoc takes one last look at Monctezuma and joins them.

**EXT. THE ARMADA - BIRD'S EYE VIEW**

13 Brigantines move slowly across the lake; men row from the massive oar line ups. The ships are in a straight line "follow the leader" formation.

ON BOARD EACH: War horses, armored SOLDIERS with steel swords, halberd spears and cross bows, war dogs-- and mounted manned cannons.

PULL DOWN AND CLOSER ON: Jaramillo stands, first ship-- tip of bow-- holding a musket. Behind him, the Page with at least twenty more muskets and a loading plunger.

**EXT. JARAMILLO'S LEAD SHIP - NIGHT**

Cortes is seated on a horse; center ship. He's stiff, perfunctory-- impotent without a weapon. Next to him, the Groom with Jaramillo's armored horse.

The moon goes behind the clouds.

POV JARAMILLO: Tiny FIGURES in the distance-- on the shore of Tenochtitlan war canoes are launching. And they are launching en mass.

JARAMILLO
(war cry)
Make ready!

**EXT. LAKE - NIGHT**

AZTEC WARRIORS paddle furiously-- their canoes slice through the water nimbly and fast. Hundreds of them-- some Warriors stand and take aim with long bows and arrows. OTHERS begin to dive into the lake and swim towards the ships.

**EXT. JARAMILLO'S LEAD SHIP - NIGHT**

Jaramillo watches the canoes-- waiting, waiting, he raises his musket as they hit the 150 yard line and FIRES a shot.

CANNONS RELEASE from all the ships on cue.

They bombard the city-- break-walls fall and canoes splinter, Warriors blowing upwards in a shower of meat and bone.

JARAMILLO
Bowman! Make ready!

SOLDIERS level cross bows-- TLAXCALAN (Cortes) WARRIORS angle long bows at the ready:

JARAMILLO
Ranks! Present and hold!

SOLDIERS with muskets line the rails. Jaramillo FIRES another musket shot.

CANNONS RELEASE from all ships.

**EXT. CUAUHTEMOC'S CANOE - NIGHT**

Cuauhtemoc watches as to the left and right of him; Canoes and Warriors are blown to bits-- gruesome aftermath showering down around him.

In front of him-- a debris stream. His Warriors paddle fiercely, cutting through it.

**EXT. JARAMILLO'S LEAD SHIP - NIGHT**

JARAMILLO
All ranks! Fire!

Everyone releases at once; Musketeers shoot in a blur of fireworks-- Crossbows release arrows as:

**EXT. CUAUHTEMOC'S CANOE - NIGHT**

Musket balls streak past-- Spanish arrows hit the side of Cuauhtemoc's canoe and:

A Spanish arrow rips into his forearm; he breaks it off-- raises a bloody fist as all Warriors raise long bows--

--lowers it as they release in a:

**EXT. JARAMILLO'S LEAD SHIP - NIGHT**

A shower of arrows plunges down from the sky-- hitting Jaramillo's Page-- horses rear-- men go down-- dogs BARK.

And they're on them-- Aztec swimmers begin to board as men take aim over the railings-- cross bows, muskets.

Shooting, stabbing, beating them off.

Moments ago they were a testament to military power. Now they're dead meat.

POV JARAMILLO: On shore, thousands of Aztecs swarm in for battle, waving weapons, SHOUTING.

JARAMILLO
Bloody hell.

Still tied to his horse, moments ago Cortes was stiff and perfunctory, now he's lit up as if electrified:

CORTES
Untie me!

The Groom looks for guidance from Jaramillo but none's coming.

CORTES
Untie me now!

Jaramillo's FIRING off the bow, one musket after another. Down to his last, he clubs an Aztec warrior with the butt of it.

The Groom crawls for cover behind a trunk.

CORTES
God damn you, untie me!

The terrified Groom hunkers down-- then Jaramillo's there-- pulling Cortes off the horse, throwing him to the ground, a boot on his neck-- knife poised.

CORTES
You murder the only true brother
you ever had?

Jaramillo tenses-- a murderous flame in his eyes.

CORTES
You forced my hand. I did what I
had to for something greater-- that
you couldn't see!
(a plea)
You-are-my-brother.

Cortes waits for the killing blow-- Jaramillo fights an inner battle-- and loses:

JARAMILLO
God have mercy on your soul,
Hernan.

Jaramillo cuts the ties.

**EXT. LAKE - BIRD'S EYE VIEW**

The ships come to shore with full battles raging on their decks-- ramming into the break waters-- horses falling from impact.

Planks are thrown down-- SOLDIERS BOIL OFF shoulder to shoulder-- they rush into city streets.

**EXT. TENOCHTITLAN - NIGHT**

The under belly of a war horse flies over us in a mid-air leap-- tack JINGLING, sweat flying-- landing on solid ground.

Jaramillo rides flat out, wielding a Halberd (spear with curved axe head), leading a mob of charging SOLDIERS. They SLAM into a wall of Aztec WARRIORS-- at least 100 deep.

Behind them-- another street is flooded with Sandoval's regiment-- Aztec WARRIORS hit them head on.

Men push against men in a bottle neck of blood and gore. Pushing harder, further into the city.

Jaramillo hacks forward with the halberd, spinning, arcing, slicing-- battling by instinct now-- his leadership's lost to personal survival. He's fighting his way through hell to get to:

**EXT. MONCTEZUMA'S QUARTERS - NIGHT**

Mali labors on in agony. The tray of sharp knives is untouched. Tearful Wives huddle around her speaking words of ENCOURAGEMENT now-- SHOUTING words of ENCOURAGEMENT in Nahuatl.

But within moments, Mali has exhausted and faded; the room falls into a HUSHED, fearful SILENCE.

**EXT. TENOCHTITLAN - NIGHT**

Fires break out-- Jaramillo bares the brunt-- blood smattered face, cutting down one warrior after another.

HOURS PASS as the living bottle neck of battling men, slowly fades to the stillness of DEAD BODIES.

A reckoning as Jaramillo becomes aware of OTHER bodies in the street, piled up, sickening decay-- small pox has taken an enormous toll-- CHILDREN, YOUNG WOMEN, YOUNG MEN.

He drops the halberd, spent. Just standing there.

He watches a SMALL GIRL wander aimlessly CRYING OUT, lost and alone. He's jolted from his sad reverie as:

SOLDIERS begin to point in horror towards the blue and red step pyramid; the temple of the sun and the rain.

Exhausted and emotionally spent, Jaramillo glances towards it and on its apex: Sandoval struggles against Priests in the torchlight; his face a mask of terror.

**EXT. TEMPLE OF THE SUN AND THE RAIN - NIGHT**

Priests lean Sandoval back-- his mouth open in a silent SCREAM, struggling-- as they rip open his shirt and:

**EXT. TEMPLE OF THE SUN AND THE RAIN - NIGHT**

Jaramillo sprints towards the temple-- a wall of steps, hundreds of steps, so steep he'll never make it:

JARAMILLO
Give me your muskets!

--GROOMS priming a pile of spent muskets pass two dutifully; Jaramillo snatches them mid-sprint-- the ramrods still in the barrels.

POV JARMILLO: A priest raises an obsidian knife over Sandoval's body-- Sandoval's face contorts-- frantic fear.

Jaramillo's kneeling at the steps-- desperately aiming-- TAKING THE SHOT.

POV JARAMILLO: A musket ball rips into the priest; he drops. Other priests pick up the knife and crowd in, obscuring our view.

Jarmillo FIRES again-- desperate hope.

POV JARAMILLO: Sandoval writhes in agony-- the priest's hands now inside his abdomen, reaching high into his chest. Sandoval's face freezes in a final GASP before his body shudders and goes limp.

Jaramillo drops the musket-- goes cold.

Then, agonizes a moment as the world crumbles around him. Head in his hands, he's locked within pure torment. His vision slowly focuses on: THE PALACE.

Jaramillo walks towards it, then jogs, then a flat out sprint.

**EXT. TENOCHTITLAN - FROM A BIRD'S EYE VIEW**

Jaramillo runs down the street towards the palace through a blanket of death-- sprawled bleeding bodies and small pox.

And the common PEOPLE continue to mob the palace walls. They pelt it with stones and SHOUT obscenities. He pushes through, SOME attacking-- Jaramillo kicking them from his path-- shoving them off. And finds his way in.

**INT. MONCTEZUMA'S PALACE - FOLLOWING**

Jaramillo enters and tracks through a maze of halls-- walking quickly now. SOLDIERS run rife looting, furniture is overturned, priceless objects broken. He ELBOW COCKS ONE SOLDIER from his path-- running now-- slides around a corner and finds himself in the:

**EXT. MONCTEZUMA'S PALACE - HOUSE OF THE EAGLES - NIGHT**

The eagle sits on its pedestal quietly-- suddenly it SCREECHES.

As a GHOST WARRIOR sneaks out from the shadows. Jaramillo hacks against the sharp arcing spear with his short sword. And he's on the edge of the snake pit, ducking the spear and leg sweeping the man down. The Ghost Warrior drops over the edge and hangs off the lip of the pit; white knuckled.

Jaramillo sees the writhing rattlers below-- sees the flickering fear in the Ghost Warrior's eyes. He reaches down to him with a "give me your hand."

The Warrior doesn't-- his grip weakening.

JARAMILLO
Give me your God damned hand!

The Ghost Warrior snarls and drops.

Jaramillo can only watch as: The warrior stands amongst hundreds of coiling snakes, looking up, as one by one they strike his calves. Jaramillo waits-- he holds the Ghost Warrior's gaze as the man sinks to his knees under the influence of the venom.

Appalled, Jaramillo backs away.

**INT. MONCTEZUMA'S QUARTERS - NIGHT**

Monctezuma's Wives crowd around Mali's bed obscuring our view. Suddenly, Jaramillo SLAMS a shoulder through the wooden door.

Monctezuma whips back, an ornate obsidian knife raised in defense.

Seeing Jaramillo, he drops the knife as Jaramillo becomes aware of Mali laboring in agonizing, dangerous childbirth.

Jaramillo's eyes pass over Monctezuma's shrouded body of ragged linens-- then back to Mali.

He sees the CHILDREN huddled together in the corner on pillows. Sees Albino Nahuatl with them.

Monctezuma speaks reassuring, soft words to Mali, yet keeps his distance. It hits Jaramillo hard as Monctezuma begins to pray over her in earnest.

A helplessness comes over Jaramillo. He's at a total loss as he simply turns and moves towards the balcony in a daze.

**EXT. BALCONY - NIGHT**

POXED PEOPLE mob the walls below; in the distance the city burns and cannon FIRE splits the air from the shoreline.

We can almost hear Jaramillo's thoughts:

*Will my child survive? Will my love survive? Will we ever make it out of here alive?*

He looks up to the sky-- clear and starry. Drops to his knees, digging into his bloodied, shredded, war vest and removing the child's gold crucifix and chain.

Shaking hands, he stares at it, then kisses it. Closes his eyes and the world goes SILENT.

*And Jaramillo prays to God-- he prays like he's never prayed before.*

A long beat-- then, A BABY'S TINY WAIL. Jaramillo listens; another WAIL then a healthy CRY and the CHEERING of Monctezuma's Wives.

Which become:

The JARRING SHOUTS of the mob as Jaramillo rushes inside.

**INT. MONCTEZUMA'S QUARTERS - NIGHT**

Jaramillo cautiously approaches the bedside as Albino Nahuatl settles his newborn CHILD into his outstretched hands.

*The most beautiful thing he's ever seen.*

He meets eyes with an exhausted but wonder-struck Mali-- so much to be said.

Monctezuma approaches. Jaramillo freezes-- eye to eye with him. A vulnerable moment as Monctezuma carefully slides Jaramillo's short sword from his scabbard.

The Child's tiny hand grips Jaramillo's finger. Jaramillo knows what's coming-- can't do anything with the Child in his arms as:

Monctezuma, armed with his sword, walks slowly towards the balcony.

JARAMILLO
Don't--!

His back to us, Monctezuma grips Jaramillo's sword tightly, then unwinds the linen covering from his head and turns back; it's terrible.

MONCTEZUMA
What you toss up into the sky, like a rock or a feather, is what comes back down to you. What you do in this life, either kills you or brushes past.
(a beat)
I have thrown rocks to the sky my entire life.

Then to his family in Nahuatl (nodding to Jaramillo):

MONCTEZUMA
Follow the Eagle. He will lead you home.

Monctezuma steps out.

JARAMILLO
No!

**EXT. BALCONY - NIGHT**

It's surreal as Monctezuma is pelted violently with rocks.

Jaramillo can only watch, holding the newborn child as:

Monctezuma takes unbelievable blows to head and body-- his fragile form struggling to his knees-- fighting for balance and driving Jaramillo's short sword into his gut-- falling onto it purposefully.

Jaramillo turns away and comes face to face with Albino Nahuatl:

ALBINO NAHUATL
(in Nahuatl)
With the sword of Cortes. It is done, Eagle.

**EXT. THE STREET - NIGHT**

Cortes has witnessed Monctezuma's demise; tears of joy flood his eyes. He fights his way towards the palace with 50 SOLDIERS.

**EXT. MONCTEZUMA'S QUARTERS - NIGHT**

Cuauhtemoc has witnessed his father's death and scales the palace walls with Ghost Warriors.

**INT. MONCTEZUMA'S QUARTERS - NIGHT**

Quiet tears; Wives and Children-- Mali curled in the bed comforting two of Monctezuma's small children and three wives.

Jaramillo cradles his child, his gaze moves from face to face; hopeful faces-- innocent faces. Jaramillo carefully places the child into the arms of Albino Nahuatl.

JARAMILLO
This child-- is now a part of this family. As am I.

Looks into Albino Nahuatl's eyes-- it's a plea-- though Albino doesn't understand the words, he gets the meaning.

Jaramillo lifts Mali from the bed into his arms.

JARMILLO
Hold on, I've got you.

She weakly WHISPERS something to him. He carries her to the open air window. Her tired eyes gaze up to the night sky, searching for it.

RISE UP TO THE NIGHT SKY: The comet is gone.

She smiles softly; satisfied. Jaramillo turns back to the royal family-- nods they follow:

JARMILLO
Stay close-- stay together!

MALI
(translates Jaramillo's words weakly.)

With one swift kick-- Jaramillo has the door open.

And: Comes face to face with Cuauhtemoc and 9 Ghost Warriors.

A tense beat as Cuauhtemoc decides whether he's going to kill Jaramillo or--

--Cuauhtemoc pans the room.

CUAUHTEMOC
(in Nahuatl)
Come.

**EXT. MONCTEZUMA'S PALACE - HALLS - NIGHT**

Jaramillo and the royal family are led quickly down the hall by Cuauhtemoc and Ghost Warriors. Cuauhtemoc opens a passage door. Everyone files through, some touching Cuauhtemoc's face, some bowing.

Cuauhtemoc grabs Monctezuma's Little Son and gives him a bundle wrapped in a dirty cloth; kisses the boy's head. Jaramillo nods to Cuauhtemoc, still cradling Mali.

JARMILLO
Gratitude.

Mali reaches out to Cuauhtemoc-- unsure, he takes her hand.

MALI
(in Nahuatl)
Thank you.

Jaramillo steps through the door.

CUAUHTEMOC
(in Nahuatl)
Wait.

Another Ghost Warrior arrives leading a Spanish horse, trotting it down the hallway.

CUAUHTEMOC
(to last ghost warrior in Nahautl)
(MORE)

CUAUHTEMOC (CONT'D)
Never leave them-- even after you breathe no more.

The Ghost Warrior enters with the horse. Cuauhtemoc SLAMS the door and breaks the lock off.

**INT. TUNNEL - NIGHT**

Unaware, Jaramillo SHOUTS at the locked door.

JARMILLO
Cuauhtemoc!

The Ghost Warrior holding the horse shakes his head “no” and urges Jaramillo ahead. OTHERS use a flint stone to light torches.

At a glance, there is no end to this long, dark tunnel; it seems to go on for miles. Jaramillo surveys his surroundings; water drips from rock hewn ceilings.

*They’re under the lake.*

A Ghost Warrior takes Mali from Jaramillo’s arms. Another motions Jaramillo mount the horse. Mali is placed into his arms atop it. Albino Nahuatl places the baby in her arms.

Jaramillo’s horse is led into darkness, the royal family’s Wives and Children following, some holding hands, others leaning on each other for support. Jaramillo notes it; a lump in his throat.

**EXT. TENOCHTITLAN - BIRD’S EYE VIEW**

PEOPLE run riot in the streets, swarming the temples and sanctuaries with desperate offerings. The dead are so thick now, SOLDIERS cross over them in the city canals; human bridges. And the city burns-- everywhere the island city of Tenochtitlan burns.

**INT. TEMPLE OF THE SUN AND THE RAIN - NIGHT**

A pack of SOLDIERS lead a captive Cuauhtemoc up the steep temple steps to the apex. They tie him to a stake.

SUBORDINATE SOLDIER
Let’s see how you take some of your own medicine, your high and mighty.

The Subordinate Soldier's contemporaries laugh rauciously. OTHERS stoke fires in the sacrificial urns, now burning hot. Someone's prepared a cauldron of boiling oil.

A QUIET SOLDIER regards his surroundings, sickened. The sanctuary is caked with blood and body matter so thick, we can almost smell it.

Cuauhtemoc's eyes focus on the horizon. Another ANGRY SOLDIER grows inpatient.

ANGRY SOLDIER
Make him tell us where the gold is!

Subordinate Soldier holds a golden necklace up to Cuauhtemoc's face:

SUBORDINATE SOLDIER
Where?

Cuauhtemoc doesn't respond.

SUBORDINATE SOLDIER
Gold! Gold, fool!

ANGRY SOLDIER
Answer us, you ignorant savage. We saw what the Cholulans had!

Cuauhtemoc does not care nor does he understand.

ANGRY SOLDIER
Burn him.

Subordinate Soldier pours hot oil onto Cuauhtemoc's feet. It's searing, blistering pain and he prays for death-- but he doesn't break. It's hard, even for Angry Soldier to watch.

ANGRY SOLDIER
Jesus Christ.

PULL OUT SLOWLY TO REVEAL: Cortes ascending the temple steps, rising into view-- calculated, cold, an odd look in his eyes.

THOUSANDS gather below-- throwing stones-- shouting-- angry-- but Cortes doesn't hear or see them. All he sees is Cuauhtemoc.

And then he's there, pushing the Soldiers back, pointing to the suffering Cuauhtemoc; he SHOUTS OUT to the world in PERFECT NAHUATL:

CORTES
Here is Cuauhtemoc, son of your dead Huey Tlatoani! Watch him die by my hand!

Unmoved by Cuauhtemoc's intense tribulation and an inch from his face, Cortes WHISPERS to him IN NAHUATL:

CORTES
You have gold stockpiled in this city. Reveal the location and I'll show mercy.

**INT. TUNNEL - NIGHT**

Torches illuminate vaults of stockpiled gold as Jaramillo's horse rides past. They are massive and filled to capacity; an immeasurable fortune.

Jaramillo's eyes are on his Child in Mali's arms. He rides past without a glance. Mali watches Jaramillo closely; his gaze moves to hers. He nods subtly, perhaps realizing a deep personal truth-- she is worth more than gold.

**EXT. TEMPLE OF THE SUN AND THE RAIN - NIGHT**

There's a wild look in Cortes' eyes as the firelight flickers over his sweating face. He waits for Subordinate Soldier to heat more oil.

Cuauhtemoc waits for death. From here Cuauhtemoc can see everything in the light of the blazing city fires.

An eagle circling over head. Tlaxcalans arriving from all directions, too many to count. The dismantling of the city, the crashing walls of flames, smoke smoldering from ruined homes and markets.

And in the very, very far distance-- a group of people emerge on the far side of the lake-- a line of flickering torches.

Cuauhtemoc WHISPERS under his breath:

CUAUHTEMOC
(in Nahuatl)
In dreams we live forever.

It is the last thing Cuauhtemoc sees before a SOLDIER rushes up the steps SHOUTING:

SOLDIER
Vaults! Beneath the city! We've found it!

CORTES
Douse him.

Subordinate Soldier pours hot oil over Cuauhtemoc's head-- Cortes torches his oil fused body. Cuauhtemoc ignites into flames instantly.

THOUSANDS watch as he violently burns, now flailing and CRYING OUT.

Drunk on power-- Cortes is unmoved.

**AND THE SUN BREAKS THE HORIZON**

Cortes descends down the steep steps quickly-- the sun's light hitting the lake-- fracturing the water into a million pieces of brilliant gold--

--even stranger, the sun hits the temple just right and the shadow of a serpent manifests-- creeping slowly down the steps-- a trick of ingenious architecture.

Unaware, Cortes stops-- eyes locked on the powerful illusion of the gold filled lake, "his vision," as the shadow passes over him.

Then: WE FOLLOW Cortes down the steps, so many steps, we never see him reach the bottom.

**EXT. WILDERNESS - FOLLOWING - SUNRISE**

Jaramillo's troupe travels up a rise into verdant green hills; waterfalls in distant mountains, colorful birds and flowers igniting the land with life.

Albino Nahuatl bounces rhythmically with each step as he SINGS softly to the bundle in his arms.

Jaramillo, atop his horse, a spent Mali sleeping, head against his chest-- glances back to Tenochtitlan. He studies the lake awash in gold.

JARMILLO
An illusion.

MALI
(sleepy hush)
--what?

JARMILLO
Something Hernan said once, power is an illusion.

She touches his heart, perhaps feeling his loss of something he once believed in.

He watches Albino Nahuatl, bobbing along with the Child-- glances to the royal Wives and Children-- his eyes now moving to the Ghost Warriors-- they seem to be recounting battle tales.

JARMILLO
Power is real. It's right here, in the land, in these people.

His eyes move over the entire landscape.

JARAMILLO
Every man, woman and child helping each other. No generals, no Tlatoani. Just life as it was meant to be.

His eyes are drawn to a blooming vine in a Banyon tree; a single hummingbird suckles a flower. Jaramillo stares at it; we almost think he'll speak to it.

But SOMEONE'S tugging on his pant's leg. Monctezuma's Little Son gazes up to Jaramillo. He offers his bundle wrapped in a dirty cloth. Jaramillo smiles-- reaches down-- it's heavy-- he unwraps it and finds:

CLOSE ON OPEN BUNDLE: The emerald crocodile eggs.

Jaramillo touches the boy's head; unspoken gratitude.

AS WE RISE UP TO A BIRD'S EYE VIEW: In the distance, fire on water.

*The city of tenochtitlan burns like hell.*

**INT. JARAMILLO ANCESTRAL HOME - SPAIN - DAY**

A meager fire burns in the grate. A coat of arms on the mantle of a vacuous place. This home has seen many years of financial hardship.

*It is only a dim shadow of what it once was.*

A DUSTY GRANDFATHER CLOCK CHIMES and a KNOCK AT THE DOOR. An OLD MAN, frail, well worn clothing, shivering with cold, shuffles towards it-- opens the door to a SOLDIER.

SOLDIER
Are you the Marques-- Federico Jaramillo?

OLD MAN
Si.

The Soldier presents a tattered package-- walks away.

OLD MAN
Gracias.

The old man opens the package shakily as an ELDERLY WOMAN approaches, barely able to walk. And GASPS.

Inside: A solitary Emerald Egg.

Tears of relief fill the Old Man's eyes.

OLD MAN
Our son-- he is alive?

Trembling hands search for a note-- find it:

OLD MAN
We are grandparents, a boy and a girl. He lives among-- the Mexicas. He is a landholder. Who fights there as a vigilante against--
(a beat)
--the Spanish?

The Old Man LAUGHS and embraces the Elderly Woman as we FADE OUT on the emerald egg.

**WRITTEN WORDS**
History would remember Hernan Cortes for the fall of the Aztec empire. He would die in Spain, shunned by his king in poverty.
(a beat)
Mali would be known as La Malinche for all time. She would be infamously hated and revered both, for her part in the fall.
(a beat)
Juan Jaramillo fathered two children with Mali within the New World of Mexico. He would fight the Spanish until his last breath, redeeming himself for his role in the destruction of the Aztec civilization. He is not remembered.