

EXT. TENOCHTITLAN. MOONLIT NIGHT.

A man in a loincloth running along a causeway.

The moon hangs in the water behind him.

A conch-shell trumpet blows. Ancient haunting call...

Legend:

City of Tenochtitlan
Aztec year: 1 bundle, 13 rabbits

The Runner is carrying something.

Sprinting all out, for his life.

CUT TO:

INT. MOCTEZUMA'S PALACE. NIGHT.

The Runner breathless, babbling in a language we cannot understand. He throws down what he was carrying.

Facing him is a PAPA (Priest) dressed in black robe, long black hair matted with blood, 4" fingernails, bloody earlobes, wild eyes.

The Papa waves his hand, dismissing the Runner, and bends down to pick up the Runner's burden.

CUT TO:

INT. MOCTEZUMA'S SLEEPING QUARTERS. NIGHT.

The Papa enters hesitantly. As he moves through the dark room, we glimpse furnishings which suggest an austere elegance. A low "bed" covered with a spectacular feather blanket...

The Papa passes the empty bed, goes out onto a:

EXT. BORDERED ROOF. NIGHT.

From the rear: MOCTEZUMA staring at a comet blazing in the sky.

The Papa speaks, eyes lowered to the ground.

Moctezuma replies with a single word.

The Papa sets down the Runner's burden and leaves.

Moctezuma turns and stares at what is on the ground:

CORPSE of a large bird.

The Emperor's features betray no reaction - he's seen it before - but his eyes fill with sick apprehension of his fate.

He turns back toward the comet.

Runs his hand along the parapet.

No...along a snake. 5-foot python. We hear a smokey old voice:

DIAZ (V.O.)
Forget it.

With an ease suggesting great familiarity, Moctezuma picks up the snake and carries it inside...

DIAZ (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Forget who you are...where you
are...what you know.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CUBAN COUNTRY HOUSE. AFTERNOON.

Rain assaults the windows as a half-dozen HIDALGOS (landowners) and their wives feast, drink, and listen to a wild and ribald story.

DIAZ (V.O.)
Forget it all and come.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROAD. AFTERNOON.

A rain of obliteration, seemingly capable of washing away our memories. A carriage hurtles through the storm.

DIAZ (V.O.)
Come with me, back to my youth...

INSIDE THE CARRIAGE

DIERO, a sniveling hunchback, hands wringing, eyes gleaming.

DIAZ (V.O.)
Back to the greatest military
campaign in human history.

CUT TO:

INT. CUBAN RANCH HOUSE. AFTERNOON.

From these few moments inside this house, we will infer the state of Western civilization. Everything proudly displayed yet primitive: we are scarcely out of the Middle Ages.

DIAZ (V.O.)
Cuba. 1519.
Just 27 years after Columbus.
It was the time, the place, and the
age...of Cortes.

MAIN TITLE: CORTES

CONTINUE MAIN TITLES.

As the titles flash, we focus on the man telling the ribald story.

DIAZ (V.O.)
When I met him, he seemed like any
other man.

Volume up faintly in the room. CORTES, 34, is speaking with mocking
sophistication of the youthful fantasies which drew him to Cuba.

CORTES
Yes, of course I dreamt of
knighthood and wealth, but the real
dream was: To go where no Christian
has gone... To see what no
Christian has seen...

His audience in the palm of his hand...

CORTES (CONT'D)
But first there was a married woman
who had smiled at me and I
wondered...

They laugh, and he continues (volume down): how he was chased by an
angry husband, broke his leg, and had to stay in Spain another year.

DIAZ (V.O.)
Cortes laughed, drank, told a good
story. He looked happy. But, like
many other men, his life was not as
good or peaceful as it seemed.

CORTES' WIFE sits at the far end of the table.

DIAZ (V.O.) (CONT'D)
He had been forced to marry his
wife, and did not love her.

Pan to ANOTHER WOMAN, odder and more beautiful than his wife.

DIAZ (V.O.) (CONT'D)
The woman he loved he could not
have.

Pan along his FRIENDS: idle gentry.

DIAZ (V.O.) (CONT'D)
And his friends were men he wanted
to love, but could not find cause.
(the CAMERA approaches his
FACE)
Cortes...was a man...who was
waiting...

Cortes finishes his story, to laughter and applause, immediately
interrupted by: POUNDING AT THE DOOR. The knock of fate.

A SERVANT ushers in a drenched Diero.

CORTES
Come in, come in, my little twisted
gnome. Sit down! Have some wine!

DIERO
Velasquez is sending another
expedition to Yucatan Island.

For an instant Cortes stops short -

Diero snatches some wine and heads off toward another room...

Cortes stares after him, then recovers his "amiable" exterior:

CORTES
I have always admired his beautiful
manners.
(to the others)
Excuse me.

CORTES' LIBRARY. MOMENTS LATER.

Diero drinks directly from the wine bottle...

DIERO
The Governor wants Bermudez to head
the expedition, but perhaps, with
my influence...

He stares at Cortes with glee, relishing his power. To his dismay,
Cortes is remarkably matter-of-fact.

CORTES
How much do you want?

DIERO
Half your profit.

He smiles nervously, thinking Cortes will erupt angrily.

Instead Cortes stares at him with an expression close to amusement.
Then he sticks out his hand.

Diero stares at the hand, hesitates (should he ask for more?) and
shakes. The deal is done.

DIERO (CONT'D)
Well, I...guess I'll join the
others.
(retreating)
I can't believe it was so easy.

He starts out. As the door is closing:

CORTES
Nothing is that easy.

Meaning: he won't pay.

He opens the shutters, stares out at the rain.

We study his face. Cheekbones rising, nostrils flaring slightly...

Something is happening to him. Something dramatic. Like a caterpillar turning into a butterfly...only this is masculine.

He crosses the room and pulls a curtain. Revealing:

A MAP of "THE KNOWN WORLD." Europe is carefully drawn but disproportionately large and central. Africa is sketched. Asia is huge, vague. South America does not exist at all.

Below North America is Cuba, and below Cuba is the Yucatan "island." Handwritten on the Yucatan: "Per Cordoba and Grijalva expeditions."

Cortes stares at the map and dips his quill into ink.

From the Yucatan, he draws an arrow Westward.

Deep into what we now know to be Pacific Ocean, his pen stops.

He draws a question mark.

Stares at it.

Sets down his quill...

The fire in his eyes would light a city.

CUT TO:

INT. GOVERNMENT BUILDING. DAY.

Cortes stands before DON DIEGO VELASQUEZ, Governor of Cuba.

VELASQUEZ

...explore the area, and trade with the natives. You are not to venture inland, not to settle the land, not on any cause to consort with Indian women.

As Velasquez drones on, we realize: Cortes isn't just accepting his commission; he's also - despite his respectful pose - carefully studying his patron.

DIAZ (V.O.)

Don Diego Velasquez, conqueror and Governor of Cuba, vassal of King Carlos of Spain, benefactor and future enemy of Hernan Cortes.

(as CAMERA MOVES IN ON

VELASQUEZ)

He was a man ruled by cowardice, fear, and greed. Remember his face.

(MORE)

DIAZ (CONT'D)
 There was hardly a moment in our campaign when this man's spectre did not stalk us... Yet we never saw him again.

Velasquez finishes his speech, licks his fat lips

Cortes makes a standing bow with his hat.

Velasquez moves away.

Cortes turns toward a crucifix, kneels quickly, and crosses himself. We realize that the bow toward Velasquez was pro forma; Cortes is now paying homage to his true master.

Velasquez stares at him, realizing the same thing...

CUT TO:

EXT. DOCKS. DAY.

Men load a ship. Some plain and rough, some gentry; even the gentry are tough, self-made men, rather than limp aristocrats.

Cortes' banner flies high over a line of recruiting tables set up on the dock. We move down the line:

1ST INTERVIEWER
 Which expedition were you on?

2ND RECRUIT, WITH SCAR (VILLAFANA)
 (charming grin)
 I want a cauldron full of gold.

THIRD INTERVIEWER (VELASQUEZ DE LEON)
 ...a business venture! If you contribute money, a musket, a horse, then you get extra shares.

CORTES (FOURTH INTERVIEWER)
 I wrote to your father, not you!
 You're too young!

He's addressing Gonzalo de SANDOVAL, whose enthusiasm, intensity, and slight stammer make him very likeable and somewhat comic.

SANDOVAL
 I'm t-t-twenty-two!

CORTES
 Exactly. Tend to your pimples.

SANDOVAL
 I haven't had a pimple in years.
 Find me a place or I will stow with the rats!

As Sandoval steps aside, the Third Interviewer (JUAN VELASQUEZ DE LEON, 27) mutters something to Cortes about the applicant he's interviewing: PEDRO DE ALVARADO, 34, a golden boy with long red hair, a massive physique, a gold chain, and sublime confidence.

ALVARADO

Isn't trouble what we're looking for? I'm stronger than any man in your army, and happier, I can wiggle my ears, and I can pull a horse down with one hand.

Cortes stares at him. But his stare is interrupted by a terrible squawking from the other end of the dock. Cortes glances that way, turns back to Alvarado:

CORTES

Step over there.

Alvarado saunters to one side as the commotion moves toward them: CRISTOBAL DE OLID, protesting loudly, is being dragged by THREE MEN. Olid is so strong he could toss the others into the drink, so we sense he's actually coming of his own free will.

CORTES (CONT'D)

Senor Cristobal! So nice of you to visit. How are your headaches?

CRISTOBAL OLID

Try to make me join, I'll kill you.

CORTES

No, no, you misunderstand. I brought you here for a contest of strength.

CRISTOBAL OLID

Don't bore me.

CORTES

This man claims he can beat you.

ALVARADO

Not just you. I can beat anybody.

CORTES

(motions: see?)
Please. Teach him some humility.

CRISTOBAL OLID

I am not a schoolmarm.

CORTES

You're walking from a challenge?

Cristobal blinks, stalks to Alvarado, holds out his right arm with a confidence that is electrifying: no way he can lose.

Alvarado grabs the outstretched hand, and they commence. A terrifying display of raw strength.

CORTES' PAGE sprints down the dock and whispers to Cortes.

Cortes turns to PUERTOCARRERO, a shy, handsome nobleman.

CORTES (CONT'D)
How soon can we sail?

PUERTOCARRERO
Two-three days.

CORTES
How many minutes?

Diero is heading toward them, accompanied by armed SOLDIERS. Puertocarrero makes for the boats, starts shouting orders.

The contest of strength continues: so equal it's comic. Both men strain and grunt, but their hands do not move even a millimeter.

As Diero approaches, Cortes motions to a SECOND PAGE, hiding in one of the dock buildings.

The Second Page unmuzzles and releases a MASTIFF, which races toward the men, barking fiercely, leaping up on them -

Cristobal curses, flails at the dog with his free arm, which allows: Alvarado to throw Cristobal to the deck.

Diero tries to speak with Cortes -

Cristobal leaps up, enraged -

CORTES (CONT'D)
(to Cristobal)
It's true, then. He is stronger?
(to Diero)
One minute.

CRISTOBAL OLID
That miserable cur almost bit me! I demand a proper contest!

CORTES
We're sailing. Only way to get satisfaction is to come along.

Cristobal glares. Cortes takes him aside, ignoring Diero's protests -

CORTES (CONT'D)
I'll give you a quarter of my profits.

CRISTOBAL OLID
What profit? You're going to die.

CORTES
Then do it out of friendship.

CRISTOBAL OLID
I never liked you.

Cortes rolls his eyes. Clearly they have a friendship, but Cristobal is professionally grumpy -

CORTES
For glory then?

CRISTOBAL OLID
Whose? You'll get it all.

CORTES
(clutching at straws)
Well... I hear the native women...
three hours with one of them is
worth a five year affair here in
Cuba. And you can take as many as
you want.

CRISTOBAL OLID
A hundred?

Cortes does a slight double-take, quickly recovers:

CORTES
Two hundred, or more...

Cristobal nods soberly. Certainly a factor worth considering.

DIERO
Cortes! As mayor of this town and
emissary of the governor, I demand -

CORTES
What is it, my friend?

DIERO
You are under arrest. If you do not
go quietly, my soldiers will fire.

The Soldiers aim their muskets at Cortes.

CORTES
What am I charged with?

DIERO
Treason. Plotting to exceed your
authority and conquer the Indians.

Both men look up at Cortes' BANNER, which reads: "Comrades: Follow the sign of the cross and through it we shall conquer."

Cortes stares at the muskets. He doesn't seem to have much choice. He holds out his hands to be manacled, and for a moment it seems our story will be over before it begins.

DIAZ (V.O.)
 Looking back, I have often wondered
 how many men, in Cortes' place,
 would even have made it out of
 port?

As the Soldiers move to shackle Cortes, he says loudly:

CORTES
 But I must caution you. These men
 already feel loyalty to me. I can't
 be responsible for what they might
 do to your town, or your person -

DIERO
 (outraged)
 You are inciting them to -

CORTES
 (quiet confidence)
 No. If I incite them, you'll know
 it.
 (as Diero hesitates)
 We sail in ten minutes.
 (giving him his excuse)
 What a pity you didn't get here in
 time to stop us.

Diero nods. He will accept this ploy.

CORTES (CONT'D)
 You cowardly sack of slime.
 (as Diero bridles)
 Just a figure of speech.
 (embracing him, whispers:)
 Don't forget your 50%!

DIERO
 You will regret that insult.

CORTES
 No. I'll either dine with trumpets
 or die on the gallows, but I'll
 regret nothing.

Cortes heads toward his ship, Puertocarrero at his side. On the deck
 of the ship: a huge pile of crucifixes of varying sizes.

CORTES (CONT'D)
 How short are we?

PUERTOCARRERO
 Fifty men and half our supplies.

CORTES
 We'll stop in Havana.

He notices Sandoval climbing aboard ship -

CORTES (CONT'D)
Hey! Kid!

Sandoval winces: he got caught.

CORTES (CONT'D)
Can you look a man in the eye and
lie?

SANDOVAL
I can learn.

CORTES
How old are you?

Sandoval looks Cortes straight in the eye:

SANDOVAL
T-t-t-twenty-five.

CORTES
(playful)
Jesus. That is awful.

He motions for Sandoval to jump on board. As they do -

CUT TO:

EXT. SHIP. NIGHT.

FLAPPING SAILS suggest ocean voyage. HOLD. Then PAN DOWN TO thick fog: like a mysterious, sinister intimation...

Cortes paces the deck. In the b.g., the other ships are anchored close at hand. Men are assembled on the decks of all the ships...

DIAZ (V.O.)
It is only 150 miles from Cuba to
the coast of the Yucatan.
None of us had any idea the true
distance we were travelling.

Cortes pauses, looks at BOTELLO, a small exotic man nervously examining tarot cards and dispensing gloom to three Deckhands.

Puertocarrero comes up to Cortes and nods: the men are ready. Cortes climbs to the topdeck and peers out: posture of a great lord. His voice echoes in the fog:

CORTES
My friends, my partners.
Tomorrow we land.
Tomorrow we place our lives and
fortunes in the hands of God, for
we know not where we go, who we
meet, what horrors we encounter, if
there will be men or arms or beasts
far stronger, more numerous, and
more terrifying than our own...
(MORE)

CORTES (CONT'D)
 We can be certain of only one
 thing: Wherever we go, we shall
 find three leagues of bad road.
 (pregnant pause)
BUT WE ARE SPANIARDS!!!

The men cheer wildly.

CORTES (CONT'D)
 Few in number, but strong in arm,
 ...and will... and resolution.
 Stronger still in the love of God.
 With His Grace may we go.
 In His Name may we survive...
 (peers out at fog)
the unknown.

The men cheer, but a slight chill lingers: the unknown...

Into this chill steps the acerbic priest, FATHER OLMEDA. As he begins the Latin Mass, we:

CUT TO:

EXT. SPANISH CAMP (YUCATAN). DAY.

Flat beaches; few trees. In the center of camp, A MAPMAKER (MARTIN LOPEZ, tall, stork-like) uses ink, finger, and fingernail to draw the Yucatan on a scroll. He marks the spot where they landed.

INSERT - MAP

(See Next Page)

EXT. SPANISH CAMP

Mundane details. Men washing clothes, swatting mosquitos, cleaning off the large pile of crucifixes. The Mastiff runs around wagging its tail, peeing. ONE COMMON SOLDIER, very young, is eating an orange and carefully placing the seeds in a handkerchief.

DIAZ (V.O.)
 The Yucatan was so named because
 the first Spaniards who landed
 asked the name of the country, and
 the natives answered, "Tectetan,"
 meaning, "I do not understand you."

The CAMERA moves out of camp, into the dense brush. A LONE INDIAN. Motionless. Watching the Spaniards...

DIAZ (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 We corrupted the word to "Yucatan."
 So the place is named, "I do not
 understand you."

Commotion in camp. A SCOUTING PARTY is returning with spoils: a few trinkets and 50 turkey chicks. Alvarado waves a fistful of fowl:

ALVARADO
Chickens here! Good fat chickens!
Fresh grub for everybody!

CORTES
How did you get these "chickens?"

ALVARADO
They gave them to us.

SANDOVAL
We t-took them.

Alvarado glares at Sandoval, then winks: it's okay, no sweat.

CORTES (CONT'D)
And the trinkets?

ALVARADO
They're hardly worth 50, 60 pesos.

CORTES
The next man who steals will be
hung!! We are here to make friends,
is that understood?!

SANDOVAL
Yes sir!

ALVARADO
(mocking)
Yes sir!

CORTES
(re: Alvarado's tone)
Are you a moron?

ALVARADO
Well...
(grins)
people've said it. But I don't
really agree.

Cortes can't help smiling. This kind of jerk is hard to resist.

ALVARADO (CONT'D)
Besides, I did make friends with
the Indians. They like me -

We glide away from them, down the line of 16 horses:

DIAZ (V.O.)
The thing I remember most about the
Yucatan was not the turkey chicks
but something that seemed a mere
curiosity.

The last of the horsemen is holding a human skull. He passes it down
to Cortes, who examines it briefly and tosses it to his PAGE.

The youthful Page inspects it with curious morbidity... Clearly the first time he's handled such a thing. He holds it up to the light, and we realize with a sickening shock: this is an omen.

CUT TO:

EXT. A BAY IN LUSH FOREST. DAY.

The Spanish ships are harbored in the bay, b.g. The men are rowing some lifeboats toward the shore...

DIAZ (V.O.)
We sailed on to Tabasco.

Suddenly 100 Indians emerge from the woods, leap into the water -

Spaniards leap into the water too. The CAMERA moves in on Sandoval, who is quickly surrounded by FOUR INDIANS...

DIAZ (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Our first military skirmish was unimportant save one thing. Four Indians surrounded Sandoval. They could easily have killed him, but they didn't even attempt it. All they tried to do was take him prisoner. It seemed strange...

Sandoval is rescued by two countrymen. The Indians retreat. Sandoval sighs with relief...then stares after the Indians: Why didn't they kill me???

CUT TO:

EXT. SPANISH CAMP. (VERACRUZ). DAY.

Cortes cuts a cross into a silk cotton tree.

CORTES
I claim this land in the name of
God and his majesty King Carlos.

Father Olmeda nods. Velasquez De Leon glares at Cortes...

Cortes' Page ushers over TWO INDIAN CAPTIVES and MELCHIOR the translator, an Indian wearing a long red Spanish cloak.

PAGE
Two captives, my liege.

CORTES
And can our invaluable translator
speak their dialect?

MELCHIOR
Yes, my lord.

CORTES
 (to Melchior)
 When you were captured by the
 previous expedition, wasn't it near
 to here?

Melchior blinks. Cortes laughs, quickly changes the subject:

CORTES (CONT'D)
 These Indians have gold trinkets.
 Where did they get them?

Melchior translates. The Captives point East and say, "Mexico."

CORTES (CONT'D)
 "Mexico?" Is that a river?

MELCHIOR
 (a beat, then:)
 No, a lake.

CORTES
 I see. Ask them what dangers we
 face.

At this question, the Indians converse in an animated fashion. Cortes watches them keenly, sensing something. He interrupts:

CORTES (CONT'D)
 How large is this approaching army?

Melchior does a double-take -

CORTES (CONT'D)
 When will it get here?

MELCHIOR
 A week? Maybe more.

Cortes nods. He knows Melchior is lying.

CORTES
 Good. Then we have time to prepare,
 don't we?

CUT TO:

EXT. CAMP. DAWN.

Cortes walking, watching, checking on his men. He passes Martin Lopez, adding to his map. We notice that Lopez has now found a quill pen to use for his mapmaking.

INSERT - MAP

(See Next Page)

SPANISH CAMP.

As Cortes walks on, we notice the extraordinary beauty of the natural surroundings. Every tree is virgin forest: lush, sweet, dense; we can almost smell the rich foliage.

CORTES
Comrade!

A soldier, CERVANTES (a buffoon with a distinctive blond beard), is sleeping on his watch. He wakes with a start, sees Cortes, and scrambles to his feet -

CORTES (CONT'D)
Go remind everyone; the penalty for sleeping on watch is death.

CERVANTES
Yes sir!, thank you, sir! I promise I wasn't drinking, sir!

Cervantes scurries off. He passes a red cloak draped over a tree branch. It is Melchior's cloak, flapping eerily in the wind...

As Cortes approaches it, he sees de Leon watching him -

CORTES
I suppose it's better to have no translator than one whose loyalties are divided...

VELASQUEZ DE LEON
Divided loyalty can be a problem.
(gestures toward the cross marked in the tree)
You cut the tree in the King's name, not Velasquez'.

CORTES
But that's understood: We serve your cousin Velasquez, but every Glory goes to God and King Carlos.

VELASQUEZ DE LEON
A very good answer...for now.

CORTES
You think I will mutiny against your cousin? I give my word that will not happen.

Velasquez The Lionhearted nods, surprised and pleased.

An alarm sounds, a call to battle.

CORTES (CONT'D)
Will you fight at my side?

Velasquez De Leon buckles his armor.

CUT TO:

EXT. BATTLEFIELD. DAY.

10,000 Indians in wild feathered costumes, faces painted black and white, hurtle toward:

Spanish infantry. They cock their muskets and fire.

The first line of Indians falls -

The whole Indian army stops short.

Silence. You can hear the trees rustle. You can also hear the awe and bewilderment inside the Indians' heads...

The musketeers re-load as the crossbowmen fire...

More Indians fall. But the rest of the natives seem to realize: this is the nature of the battle. They resume fighting.

The next time the Spaniards fire, the Indians keep coming.

Quickly the battle is joined. Hand-to-hand combat: fierce, athletic and competitive. (Underneath, barely audible: A RUMBLING SOUND.)

The Spaniards stay in tight formation, backs to each other, so their rears are protected and their superior weaponry can prevail. The Indians fight as individuals seeking captives. We realize: this is an army of soldiers vs. a band of warriors.

As the RUMBLING SOUND grows louder, we focus on Cristobal: in battle he is a different man. An animal. Fierce, wild, fearless, the equivalent of 20 men, he seems to rejoice in battle. Our admiration grows with each second we watch him...and then he speaks:

CRISTOBAL

I'm getting cranky! Where the hell
is the damn - (cavalry!)

Then he too hears the RUMBLING. Turns to see the Indians watching:

The Cavalry race toward them. Horses. These huge beasts, spit flying from their mouths, the incredible musculature of their chests, this wild look in their eyes...

DIAZ (V.O.)

We knew from the two previous
expeditions that the natives had
never seen horses before.

The Indians gape in consternation but stand their ground until the horses, only yards away, are reined in so that they raise their front legs in an apparent attack posture -

The Indians flee in terror...

DIAZ (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 They thought these beasts were
 centaurs, magical creatures: half-
 men, half-hornless deer.

As the cavalry gives chase, the Indians vanish into the woods.

CUT TO:

EXT. SPANISH CAMP. DAY.

Men relaxing, enjoying the victory. Cortes sits under a copse of palms and watches as his Page leads a horse toward him.

DIAZ (V.O.)
 This battle gave our Captain his
 first brilliant idea.
 A small mare was in heat.

Cortes shakes his head, directs his Page to a different spot.

Satisfied, Cortes nods and the mare is tethered. She squats and rubs her bottom on the ground.

CUT TO:

EXT. SPANISH CAMP. EVENING.

Cortes under the same palm trees; the mare is gone.

Approaching him is a procession of Indian Caciques. These brightly adorned chiefs have holes in their lips and ears in which rings and stone disks have been inserted.

Cortes leads the Caciques to the spot where the mare was sitting.

They bow to him; he bows back. No-one to translate.

Cortes signals, and his Page leads a STALLION WITH RIDER toward them.

The horse whinnies loudly, smells the ground, snorts, paws the ground... He's staring right at the Indians...

The Indians cower. Why is this beast so angry at them?

Cortes mimes: he wants food.

The Indian Chiefs nod anxiously and back away in fear -

CUT TO:

EXT. SPANISH CAMP. RIVERBANK. THE NEXT DAY.

An Indian procession. Porters bringing food, followed by ten BEAUTIFUL NATIVE GIRLS (nine naked to the waist), and lastly: FIVE CHIEFS. In the center, supported by several men because he's too large to walk, is the FAT CACIQUE, their leader.

DIAZ (V.O.)

As Cortes requested, food came...
and other gifts.
But these Indians were not the ones
we'd been fighting. Instead, they
came from Cempoala. We were
learning that, as in ancient
Greece, the land here was divided
not into countries, but into city-
states.

As the half-naked girls approach, the Spaniards - Cristobal most
especially - stare with undisguised lust...

ALVARADO

I like the one in green.

Cristobal sticks out his hand: arm-wrestle?

ALVARADO (CONT'D)

No, no, you're champion now. You
pick first.

CRISTOBAL

(nods, stares)

Actually, I like them all.

The Fat Cacique arrives in front of Cortes, dismounts from his litter
with some difficulty, and attempts to bow.

Cortes stifles a smile and bows back.

LATER.

Nine Indian Girls are being baptized by Father Olmeda as the Spanish
Captains look on, admiring the girls' breasts...

CORTES

I trust no man casts a lascivious
eye on a religious ceremony...

CRISTOBAL

The contrary. We are filled with
awe at what the Lord has created.

Velasquez De Leon approaches, preceded by the tallest and most
beautiful of the Native Girls, MARINA, still fully clothed.

VELASQUEZ DE LEON

Captain, this one speaks Spanish.
(as Cortes looks her over)
She claims to have been a princess.

CORTES

What's your name?

MARINA

Malinali Tenepal. You will call me
Marina.

CORTES
I will, eh?
How did you learn Spanish?

MARINA
When my father died, my mother the
Queen sold me as a slave to favor
the children of her second husband.
Another slave, with me, was a
Spaniard.

CORTES
From which expedition?

She shrugs.

CORTES (CONT'D)
Where is this Spaniard now?

MARINA
Gone.
(i.e., dead)

CORTES
He was your lover, then?

MARINA
(flat)
No.

Cortes stares at her. She stares back. A pride both admirable and infuriating...

CORTES
So...your own family, your own
mother, betrayed you.

MARINA
She betrayed herself.

He stifles a smile of appreciation.

CORTES
Since you are a princess and
deserve the best, I give you...
(looks over his men, seems to
focus on Alvarado)
to my good friend...Puertocarrero.

Puertocarrero steps forward, blinking, shy but quite pleased. Marina shoots him the briefest glance.

CORTES (CONT'D)
However, you will be on call day
and night as my translator.

Conch shell trumpets sound.

A cortege of ornately dressed INDIANS approaches. Their clothing, hairstyle, and manner all set them apart from the Cempoalans.

In fact, the Fat Cacique is being carried toward a dense grove of mangrove trees. He's gesturing frantically: hurry, hurry!

The rest of his tribe precedes him. In seconds, they are gone. Cortes glances at Marina, then at the approaching Indians -

MARINA

Aztecs. They have conquered most of these towns from a city, Mexico, high in the mountains.

CORTES

Mexico? Where the gold is?

MARINA

They call it "excrement of the Gods."

CORTES

Then you - you're not an Aztec?

MARINA

Never. The Mexicans conquered my city. They rule harshly, through fear.

Her eyes dart toward the woods where the Cempoalans are hiding.

Cortes follows her gaze.

CORTES

Good.

She shoots him a glance. Why "good?"

The AZTECS arrive. Their simple cloaks and sandals evoke the garb of the Ancient Greeks.

On the other hand, their ears, lips, and noses are garnished with pendants formed of precious stones.

SERVANTS cloud the air with copal incense, others display gifts.

THREE PRINCES touch the ground, then their heads, in greeting. They speak alternately, diffusing their identity.

MARINA

They come from the great Lord Moctezuma who sends these gifts as a token of friendship. They say his capital is too far to travel to, and the road beset with too many enemies...

CORTES

Good God.

The Servants have set out two magnificent circular plates, one silver, the other gold, both as large as carriage wheels. The silver plate represents the moon, the gold one the sun. Both are ornately wrought with calendar signs and images of Gods.

Cortes' young PAGE (who, through dress and manner, suggests the coming of the modern mercantile age) steps forward to recount:

PAGE

The gold plate alone is worth
20,000 pesos and the workmanship
surpasses anything in Europe.

CORTES

These bribes whet my appetite.

MARINA

We Indians say: the greater the
gift, the greater the King.

CORTES

Tell them I too come from a
powerful King who orders me to pay
personal respects to Lord
Moctezuma, of whose greatness he
has long heard tell. As I have had
a difficult journey over the sea, I
dare not return home without seeing
Moctezuma face to face.

SANDOVAL

King Carlos doesn't know -

Cortes silences him with a look -

One of the Aztec Princes replies testily:

MARINA

"You hardly arrive and you insist
on seeing on our Emperor's face?"

One Prince points at something, and the others jabber excitedly.
Cortes watches this, then glances inquiringly at Marina.

MARINA (CONT'D)

They call you "Teules." Gods. Or
perhaps those sent by the Gods...

Cortes nods thoughtfully...

MARINA (CONT'D)

(pointing)
That soldier's helmet reminds them
of the War God Huitzilopochtli.

Cortes whispers to his Page, who runs to fetch the gilt helmet.

CORTES

They may take this helmet to show the great Moctezuma...providing they return it filled with gold. We Spanish suffer a disease of the heart which can only be cured by gold.

He gestures, and four horses approach, their bells jingling.

The Aztecs stand, mouths agape, watching the horses.

An Aztec scribe quickly paints the horses onto bark paper. He has already sketched Cortes, Marina, and the Spanish ships.

ON CORTES AND MARINA

Walking together.

CORTES

The helmet, horses. Is that why they call us Gods?

MARINA

Your looks, ships, clothing - it's all strange to them. You are not like men. So what are you?

CORTES

(nods, answers:)
Gods. Which ones?

MARINA

They mentioned the great Teule Quetzalcoatl. 500 years ago he sailed to the East, promising to return. He had light hair, like some of your men. Perhaps you are him. Perhaps King Carlos is. Perhaps this, your coming, fulfills an ancient prophecy.

(as Cortes thinks)

You must know: to the Aztec, prophecy is law. It is even the same word.

We see a thousand calculations race through Cortes' mind...

CORTES

You say the Aztecs rule, but the other cities hate and fear them?

MARINA

Yes.

CORTES

Then we can win.

They've reached the woods where the Fat Cacique and the other Cempoalans are hiding.

CORTES (CONT'D)
Ask him if he is a vassal of the
great Moctezuma?

She speaks; the Fat Cacique quickly replies:

MARINA
"Who is not?"

CORTES
Tell him we will protect him. We
are Gods, and our will is
indomitable.

He watches the Indian Chief's face as Marina translates.

Then his eyes turn to her: Clearly he finds her impressive.

He looks back at the Fat Cacique:

DIAZ (V.O.)
Cortes' words had the desired
effect, but he was soon to learn...

CUT TO:

EXT. SPANISH CAMP. HOURS LATER.

As Spanish troops admire Moctezuma's gifts, Velasquez De Leon and Cristobal approach Cortes' tent. He sits outside polishing his boots.

DIAZ (V.O.)
...that our will, of which he spoke
with such pride, was already
weakening.

VELASQUEZ DE LEON
It is time to return to Cuba.

Cortes stares at him.

CRISTOBAL OLID
We speak for many of the men.

CORTES
Is something wrong with the girl I
gave you?

CRISTOBAL OLID
No, she's very...primitive...
(smile, then frown)
but so are the mosquitos here,
they've activated my skin rashes -

VELASQUEZ DE LEON
And considering the gifts Moctezuma
has already given us -

CORTES
Do you leave the table if the
appetizer is savory?

VELASQUEZ DE LEON
We were sent here to make contact!
To trade! We have done so. We have
gold beyond our expectations -

CORTES
Whose expectations?

VELASQUEZ DE LEON
And - most important - we have done
our duty and completed our mission.
Anything more would be mutiny.

Cortes stares at him.

CORTES
You're right. Of course.
We sail in the morning.

Cristobal grins, de Leon is taken aback.

CORTES (CONT'D)
Please spread word among the men.

CUT TO:

MINUTES LATER.

From a distance we see the news disseminating and the expressions of
incredulity and outrage it evokes.

An angry crowd is descending on Cortes' tent.

Cortes continues to polish his boots, seemingly oblivious to the
uproar. But his attention is focused on:

Outside a nearby tent, Puertocarrero and Marina sit on the grass.

CUT TO:

AN HOUR LATER.

The whole Spanish company assembled in front of Cortes' tent. The
Captain is arguing with Alvarado, Puertocarrero, others:

CORTES
But I cannot exceed my authority!

ALVARADO
Hang your authority! What about
your duty to us?
(MORE)

ALVARADO (CONT'D)
 You promised us riches and glory!
 Are we to return home like gypsies,
 with a few trinkets?

Cortes stares at him, at the others.

He jumps up on a makeshift table, and the men quiet.

CORTES
 The decision I made earlier has
 caused great dissention.

Cheers and angry shouts from the crowd.

CORTES (CONT'D)
 I realize now I cannot fulfill my
 moral obligation to you and also to
 the esteemed Governor of Cuba.
 Honor therefore requires that I
 resign my post.

He jumps down from the table.

Stunned silence.

Murmurs in the crowd. What does this mean? What happens now? Do we
 choose a new leader?

Sandoval glances quickly at Cortes, as if for a sign.

Cortes gives none. Velasquez de Leon watches as:

Sandoval waits... Looks around... Bites his lip and gives Cortes
 another glance -

Very subtly: Cortes nods -

Sandoval jumps on the table. Speaking publicly, his stutter is gone.

SANDOVAL
 If Cortes is loyal to us, are we
 loyal to him!

CROWD
 Yes!

SANDOVAL
 Do we want a new leader?

CROWD
 No!

SANDOVAL
 Then who must we serve, the
 Governor of Cuba, or the King of
 Spain?!

CROWD
 The King of Spain!

VELASQUEZ DE LEON
 (wry, to Cortes)
 This is very well done.

CORTES
 Thank you.

SANDOVAL
 Then let us found a new city, in
 the name of the King:

As the Crowd cheers, Velasquez de Leon mutters sarcastically:

VELASQUEZ DE LEON
 "And there is only one man..."

SANDOVAL
 And there is only one man to be
 mayor of our city...

As the Crowd drowns him out -

CUT TO:

INT. CORTES' TENT. LATER.

Cortes and Father Olmeda with the major Hidalgos.

CORTES
 We are now outlaws.
 If we fail to conquer, if we cannot
 seize riches which will blind the
 King, then we'll all hang for
 treason. We will therefore approach
 King Carlos directly, give him the
 treasures Moctezuma has sent, and
 beg him to grant us supremacy.
 (turns to Puertocarrero and
 another Hidalgo)
 Since you have relatives in court,
 you two can best plead our cause.

PUERTOCARRERO
 And my Indian concubines?

CORTES
 Show one as a curiosity to the
 King. Marina, of course, must stay
 here, to translate.

PUERTOCARRERO
 Of course.

He smiles, realizing he has been chosen because Cortes desires
 Marina. He and the other Hidalgo kneel in front of Father Olmeda, who
 makes the sign of the cross over them. They kiss his hand.

EXT. TENT. DAY.

Cortes and Father Olmeda watch the two emissaries walk down, toward the shore and the ships.

DIAZ (V.O.)
Puertocarrero's ship was the last
of our fleet ever to leave port.

CUT TO:

EXT. OPEN FIELD. DAY.

The Spanish army building a stone fort. Cortes deposits a small boulder next to a "mason" and heads off for another stone.

He passes Martin Lopez adding "Villa Rica de Vera Cruz" to his map.

INSERT - MAP

(See Next Page)

OPEN FIELD.

Under a tree where several men are being kept prisoner, Cortes throws himself down beside the shackled Velasquez de Leon:

CORTES
Velasquez knew we would betray him.
He himself forced our hand.

Velasquez De Leon says nothing.

CORTES (CONT'D)
By withholding funds, he made us
spend our own fortunes, which we
did, mortgage our homes, which we
did. He cannot then expect us to
return home and suffer bankruptcy!

VELASQUEZ DE LEON
Nevertheless: Velasquez is my
relative, and I remain loyal.

CORTES
I admire that.
I will release you tomorrow.

VELASQUEZ DE LEON
(surprised, but:)
Why not today? Now?

CORTES
You need time to think.

VELASQUEZ DE LEON
About what?

CORTES

The purpose for which you are born.

VELASQUEZ DE LEON

Oh please.

CORTES

Do you really want to return to Cuba and live the life of a nobleman, feasting off the labor of others and seducing your neighbor's wives?

VELASQUEZ DE LEON

Sounds pleasurable.

CORTES

It is pleasurable. And common. Any Frenchman can do it.

But here...

If we have courage, intelligence, spirit, we can achieve something remarkable. And the most remarkable part is: We don't know what we're about to do!

We only know that if we succeed, we will have been truly alive. And years from now, centuries, others will look back and say, "Cortes was a man. Velasquez De Leon?... A man."

Drink?

He offers De Leon some water. The other man hesitates, then:

VELASQUEZ DE LEON

Thank you.

He drinks.

Cortes takes the bottle back, returns to work.

Velasquez De Leon stares after him.

CUT TO:

EXT. VIRGIN FORESTS. DAY.

Father Olmeda looks on as Alvarado pounds into the ground one of the smaller crucifixes they brought on the boat. Behind them:

The Spanish Army is marching through countryside of unspeakable lushness and beauty. Tropical birds singing. Orchids blooming in the wild. The Mastiff chasing plentiful game. The army is - for the moment - optimistic, united in its purpose, and enthralled by the natural beauty of the scenery.

DIAZ (V.O.)
We built a fort at our new city of
Vera Cruz and marched toward
Cempoala.

They approach a small town.

DIAZ (V.O.) (CONT'D)
It was on our way to the home of
the Fat Cacique that we first saw
evidence of the religious practice
which engendered fear in our hearts
and outrage in our Christian souls
for as long as we were in New
Spain.

The town seems deserted.

The Soldiers move through it, but some instinct quiets them.

They approach prominent buildings and glance inside.

Sandoval stands motionless in the entrance to the largest building (a church or cue). Is he frozen? Then he turns toward the others.

Blanches. Starts to stutter uncontrollably...

Cortes moves to his side, looks in:

INT. CUE. DAY.

No windows.

Dark, lit by a few torches.

Primitive statues of heathen gods.

Bodies.

Human bodies, carved up.

Some impaled on the walls.

Stacks of skulls along another wall.

Human organs burning over a fire.

Cortes turns away, toward Father Olmeda.

CORTES
Father, give me strength.

CUT TO:

EXT. CEMPOALA. DAY.

Rinky-dink parade. Girls throwing flowers, putting wreaths around the Spaniards' necks. Hail the conquering heroes. Everyone staring and waving at the Teules.

Lush vegetation makes this modest town feels like a garden.

The procession ends at the lavish home of the Fat Cacique. His WIVES greet the Spanish Captains and lead them into:

EXT. FAT CACIQUE'S PATIO. DAY.

Cortes, Marina, and the other Hidalgos at a huge feast. The Fat Cacique is stuffing himself, jabbering happily:

MARINA

He regrets that only nine of his wives can be here to serve us.

CRISTOBAL

How many wives does he have?

As Marina translates, the others eat with evident relish.

MARINA

He's lost count. The more you have, the more alliances you make. Also the more children, which allows you to make even more alliances when they grow up.

(hesitates, then translates:)

He says it's his duty as a chief to spend most of his time in bed.

Everyone laughs...then they notice: something odd in the Fat Cacique's expression. He is no longer laughing. He is staring with dread out at the street where:

FIVE MEN with dark glossy hair tied in a bun, wearing richly-embroidered cloaks, stroll with cocksure pride through the square. They sniff bouquets of flowers while SERVANTS whisk away flies. Their stiff walk, their arrogance, tells us: these men are killers.

At the sight of them, the Fat Cacique turns pale, starts babbling.

MARINA (CONT'D)

"Moctezuma's tax-collectors. They rape the pretty women and sacrifice the men."

CORTES

(blithe instinct)
Arrest them.

Marina hesitates to translate this.

Cortes nods: translate.

She does.

The Fat Cacique falls to the ground and begs for Cortes' mercy.

CORTES (CONT'D)
Tell him he has nothing to fear.

As Marina translates, the Fat Cacique continues to babble like an infant and roll on the ground.

Cortes crouches over the man. Staring.

Their eyes lock. No contest.

The Fat Cacique whispers an order, and his SOLDIERS rush out:

They begin to arrest the astonished Tax Collectors...

CUT TO:

EXT. CORTES' TENT. NIGHT.

Cortes lies on his bedroll; Marina stands nearby.

A knock, and Sandoval enters.

SANDOVAL
The locals saw n-n-nothing.

Cortes nods - go ahead with the plan.

Sandoval waves his arm, and FOUR SOLDIERS carry in two of Moctezuma's Tax Collectors, tied to long poles.

CORTES
(to Marina)
Ask them who they are and where they're from.
(to Soldiers)
Untie them.
(to Sandoval)
Have food brought to the next tent.

SANDOVAL
Can I w-watch what you do?

Cortes nods slightly as -

MARINA
They say you know who they are, since you are responsible for their capture. The Cempoalans wouldn't dare arrest them on their own.

CORTES
If this were true, would I now release them, and feed them, and treat them as Kings?
(MORE)

CORTES (CONT'D):
 (to Sandoval, as Marina
 translates)
 Convincing?

MARINA
 They think it's a trick. "If they
 are released here, the Cempoalans
 will recapture and kill them."

CORTES
 Our boats will take them South to
 safer waters.
 (watches Marina translate, then
 says to her:)
 I am impressed you betray nothing
 in your expression.

MARINA
 What is to betray?

Meaning: I am on your side, I have no other loyalties.

He stares at her.

CORTES
 Now I must ask them to go next door
 and eat. I have private business.
 (as Marina starts to leave)
 With you.

MARINA
 What do you want?

Sandoval hurries the Tax-Collectors out -

CORTES
 A kiss.

MARINA
 Only one?

CORTES
 I ask for one. Anything more is a
 gift.

MARINA
 If I refuse?

Hard to tell if she wants to refuse or is being coy.

CORTES
 If your refusal is genuine,
 I will respect it. If it is
 a game, I will not.

Beat.

MARINA
 I will kiss you twice...but only
if you order it.

She speaks with intensity. We can't tell if she is being sincere or provocative. He stares at her.

CORTES
Take off your clothes.

She starts to disrobe. On her lips, the faintest hint of a smile.

CUT TO:

EXT. CEMPOALA. MORNING.

Cortes sits in front of the Fat Cacique's house, the Chief at his side, Marina behind him. The Captain seems distant, keenly watchful, as though listening to music no one else can hear.

The Three additional Tax Collectors are brought before them, bound. Cortes, feigning anger, gestures toward the Fat Cacique.

CORTES
Tell him I'm outraged by the escape of the two prisoners. We will have to guard the ones who remain.
(as Marina translates, to de Leon)
Same as the others. Sail them South and release them.
(to Sandoval)
Do you understand?

SANDOVAL
The C-Cempoalans are forced to be our ally. But Moctezuma...?

CORTES
Are we Gods or men, friend or foe? He will have to see us for himself.
(sudden shift)
What's going on?

SANDOVAL
How do you m-mean?

CORTES
Over there.

He indicates TWO SOLDIERS whispering back and forth.

Sandoval shrugs: so?

Cortes catches the eye of one Soldier who glances furtively away -

CORTES (CONT'D)
Search the camp.

SANDOVAL
For what?

CORTES
Whatever you find.

CUT TO:

EXT. SHIP'S HOLD. DAY.

Cortes, Sandoval, Marina, and Velasquez de Leon stare at:
Food, barrels of water, maps, etc. Provisions.
Cortes is clearly: enraged...

CUT TO:

INT. CORTES' TENT. SUNSET.

The best men congregated. An uncomfortable silence...

VELASQUEZ DE LEON
Some of you know what happened.
Some do not.

CRISTOBAL OLID
What happened?

SANDOVAL
M-m-mutiny.

CRISTOBAL OLID
No! For what cause?

VELASQUEZ DE LEON
Men were stashing provisions to
return to Cuba.

CRISTOBAL OLID
A worthy cause, but treacherous
means! Let me kill the vermin -

Velasquez De Leon raises the flap in the tent, making visible:

The body of a GAUNT SOLDIER hanging from a tree.

Cristobal nods with satisfaction -

CORTES
(softly)
We must act.

Silence. They wait.

CORTES (CONT'D)
If a wild beast has no escape, it
fights with twice the ferocity. We
must do that to ourselves.

Silence as they try to figure out what this means...

CUT TO:

EXT. CAMP. NIGHT.

The soldiers stand by their tents, peering at the distant water, where the ships rise and fall with the swell of the ocean.

No one moves. Everyone waits. For what? An order?

Then we see: flames licking at the bow of one of the ships.

The men tense, but say nothing.

The fire rises higher, up the mast.

Another ship explodes into flame.

EXT. SHIPS. NIGHT.

Cortes himself with a torch setting a ship aflame. His eyes are wide, crazed, as if possessed by some demon. Pyromania. When the ship is well lit, he dodges through the flames, climbs over the side into a lifeboat, and heads for the next vessel. His torch held high in the air...

EXT. CAMP. NIGHT.

Soldiers still watching. Ten ships now burning. Cervantes (the blond-bearded buffoon we met earlier) is putting on a song/dance for a common soldier, VILLAFANA.

CERVANTES

They say the hulls were rotten!
They say we could not sail!
They think our brains are cotton!
Or hidden up our tail!

VILLAFANA

Shut up.

CERVANTES

(facetious)
But don't you understand? This way
we salvage the sails and the
provisions -

VILLAFANA

(ominous)
I understand perfectly.

Velasquez De Leon has happened by, overheard:

VELASQUEZ DE LEON

Like it or not, we have to fight
our way out of here.

Nearby, we see Cortes on his way back from the shore. His face is blackened, but his spirit is ecstatic. Cristobal intercepts him:

CRISTOBAL
I hate you for this.

CORTES
Are you afraid?

CRISTOBAL
Never.

Cortes gives him a long look...

CORTES
Then you may leave. One vessel is still seaworthy. Those who desire to go may sail to Cuba. You organize the sailing.

Cristobal is astonished. He bows acceptance, and leaves.

Cortes watches as Cristobal starts conferring with other Soldiers.

CUT TO:

EXT. CAMP. TWO DAYS LATER.

Men breaking break camp (folding tents, loading horses). Cristobal approaches Cortes and hands him a list.

Cortes examines the list...and sadly shakes his head.

CORTES
I'm sorry, you're my best soldier.
(off Cristobal's blink)
I can't let you go.

CRISTOBAL OLID
That's not fair when others are -

CORTES
I'm not letting the others either I just wanted this list.

CRISTOBAL OLID
But...but you said -

CORTES
I lied.
The last ship was sunk this morning.

Cortes points:

Cristobal looks toward the bay: it's empty. No ships remain. He turns, outraged and astonished, back toward:

CORTES (CONT'D)
 (waving list)
 I have to know who has doubts, but
 we'll need every single man, even
 the doubters, if we are to succeed.

Cristobal blinks in disbelief -

Cortes slaps him good-naturedly on the back.

CORTES (CONT'D)
 Let's march.

CUT TO:

EXT. LOW MOUNTAINS. DAY.

A cloud of pink butterflies. The Spanish Army marches through it,
 followed by a small group of Indian warriors and PORTERS.

Three of the Porters are burdened with heavy piles of crucifixes: the
 crosses the Spaniards brought with them on their ships. The sight of
 these innocent natives bearing symbols of human guilt is doubly
 ironic because of the magic of these surroundings:

woods

waterfalls

meadows

sky

mountains rising and falling...

fields of flowers of raucous color...

It all strikes some atavistic memory: Long ago, before "civilized"
 man wrecked his havoc, this is how the world used to be. Paradise.

DIAZ (V.O.)
 We saw no bird, no flower, no tree
 or animal we had ever seen in
 Spain.
 It truly was a New World.

Cortes pauses to survey his surroundings. Snowy peak on the left and
 a strange bleak mountain, topped with a black coffin-shaped rock, on
 the right. In the distance, two volcanos spew ash.

Martin Lopez is adding these features to his map.

INSERT - MAP

(See Next Page)

EXT. MOUNTAIN PINE FORESTS. DAY.

Thick woods. Cortes listens as an Indian guide points upward...

DIAZ (V.O.)
We were marching to a city-state
called Tlascala.

Cortes resumes the march. Behind him, other Spaniards pick their way along the trail...

MARINA
By their courage, and their
location high in these mountains,
the Tlascalans have kept their
independence from the Aztecs.

Cortes suddenly stops, yanks something from his collar, and throws it to the ground. A piece of colored paper. We notice:

A series of threads hang across the trail. Dangling from them are bits of paper in odd shapes and bright colors.

MARINA (CONT'D)
Charms. To keep us out.

From a distance we see Cortes slice the threads with his sword. This POV tells us: he's being watched.

CORTES
Send our message again: "If blood
is spilled, it is on their heads.
We come in peace, seeking allies."

A distinctively dressed MESSENGER sprints away -

Suddenly, by a camera trick, we see INDIANS in the forest. 30 of them. Staring, motionless. They seem to be of the trees.

CUT TO:

EXT. TLASCALAN TOWN. DAY.

Deserted. Two tiny native dogs sniff the huge Spanish Mastiff. Center of the square: lattice-work cages containing captives...

MARINA
Men to be sacrificed.

Cortes cuts the leather lock and throws open the cage.

Some captives run. Those who seem stronger and braver do not. Cortes tries to chase them away, shouting and waving his sword.

CORTES
Go! Run! Flee, you morons!
(lunging with his sword)
What, you want to die?

MARINA
Aztecs.

CORTES
Are Aztecs so stupid?

MARINA
They learn from birth: the greatest
honor is to die in battle or be
sacrificed as a prisoner of war.

Cortes stares at them, the foe he will soon face: FIVE MEN watching
him blankly: without fear, without pride, without affect.

CORTES
Make them kneel.
(as his men hesitate)
Make them kneel if you have to cut
off their feet!

Spaniards force the prisoners to their knees.

Cortes removes the cross from his neck and holds it over them.

CORTES (CONT'D)
Father, say a mass for the souls of
these poor devils.

Olmeda begins.

The Spaniards fall to their knees. All of them. The movement carries
down the hill until even those who cannot see, let alone hear, have
joined the prayer.

After a slight hesitation, Marina also kneels.

For a moment, we are witnessing a religious ceremony...

Then, spectators:

EIGHT PAPAS proceed slowly, one by one, out of a nearby cue. They are
dressed in dark green hooded cloaks decorated with images of skulls
and Gods. Their thick hair hangs to their feet and is matted with
blood. Evil magicians out of Dr. Seuss. Their fingernails are 5"
long, and they click them as they walk.

Olmeda ignores them. The other Spaniards want to rise, but cannot do
so without being disrespectful to their God.

The Papas march round the cage, uttering incantations.

Cortes shoots Marina an enquiring look -

MARINA
Priests. They're called Papas -

CORTES
They stink.

MARINA

Blood. From sacrifices, and from
stabbing themselves with thorns.
They are the sons of Chiefs, have
no wives, and they indulge in
sodomy.

Cortes stares at the Papas in astonishment and disgust.

The Mastiff barks furiously at the Papas and strains at its leash.

One Papa brings something from under his robe:

A human heart dripping blood.

He holds it under Cortes' nose.

MARINA (CONT'D)

He's trying to see if you're a God.
(off Cortes' look)
A God would eat it.

The heart, inches from Cortes' mouth.

His nostrils flare. Hard to stifle the homicidal impulse. Suddenly,
in the midst of a Latin phrase:

FATHER OLMEDA

To arms.

It takes a second for this to register.

The Papas scurry away -

The barking Mastiff falls dead, arrow in its chest -

FATHER OLMEDA (CONT'D)

To arms, men! To battle!

The Spaniards look up: INDIANS descending -

The sky darkens with stones and arrows -

The Spaniards rise, fumble for weapons. Several men are hit by the
arrows -

Indians rush forward. Startling attire: great feather crests, bodies
and faces gaudily painted; Caciques adorned with spectacular animal
headdresses. Cacophony: they bang drums, whistle, blow trumpets...

The Spaniards, surprised and overwhelmed, hastily retreat behind
neighboring houses...

They load muskets and crossbows. Unsheathe swords. Ready their
lances...

At a signal from Cortes, they move out into the open again:

The town is deserted. The Indian army has vanished. The Spaniards move forward warily, fearful of another attack...

But there is nothing to fear. Nothing to see...

Except: a cooking pot lying in the center of the square.

In the pot is an Indian tunic...a distinctive one... Someone lifts it, examines it...

MARINA

Your messenger. They killed him
...and ate him...and intend to do
the same to you.

A wave of horror and disgust passes through the Spaniards. As if to counter any fear in his men, Cortes is quite matter-of-fact:

CORTES

Why don't they believe we seek
allies?

Marina looks into the pot, takes out a drawing: of a bird.

MARINA

They think it's a trick and you're
secretly in league with the Aztecs.

Cortes nods, peers out at the haunting landscape...

CORTES

So. It begins.

CUT TO:

EXT. BATTLE. DAY.

A wide field.

Indians marching toward the waiting Spaniards. Tlascalans shouting insults, whipping themselves up into a frenzy.

Cortes is in the rear, Sandoval at his side. Sandoval points to the front of the Tlascalan ranks.

SANDOVAL

We are told their General is
Xicotencatl The Younger.

XICOTENCATL THE YOUNGER, 65, wears a headdress capped with the face of a heron.

CORTES

The "Younger?"

Sandoval points up to a bluff overlooking the battle. XICOTENCATL THE ELDER is blind. Two Servants describe the battle to him.

SANDOVAL
Xicotencatl The Elder is 140 years
old and still the greatest
Tlascalan chief.

A HUGE COMMOTION as the battle is joined. Alvarado screaming, leading the Spaniards, cutting a swath through the Indian ranks.

The CAMERA PANS over the battlefield until we come to another bluff, on which stand 3 AZTEC SCOUTS:

DIAZ (V.O.)
The Aztecs watched in fear. For centuries they had tried to conquer Tlascalala. And failed. There we were, only a few hundred men, fighting battle after battle, day after day...

Return to the battle. Velasquez de Leon's horse has been wounded. He's trying valiantly to protect it, but there are too many Indians around, and he is finally driven back.

The Indians begin, quite crudely, to sever the horse's head.

DIAZ (V.O.) (CONT'D)
The head of this horse was borne that night to every city in Tlascalala, so the people could see it was not a supernatural creature.

The battle rages through A SERIES OF DISSOLVES, as the light fades.

DIAZ (V.O.) (CONT'D)
We fought all day. We fought until we could no longer lift our arms, and by some miracle, they retreated...

The Indians blow their conch shells, pound their drums, and shout, "Alala! Alala!" They throw straw and dirt into the air to obscure their retreat. Soon a brown cloud hovers over the field.

DIAZ (V.O.) (CONT'D)
We hoped our victory might weaken their resolve.

As the dirt falls and the air clears, the battlefield is empty.

No warriors. No Indian corpses. Where have they gone?

Eerie. As if it had all been a mirage...except that a score of Spaniards lie dead in the dirt.

Cortes looks at Sandoval, shakes his head.

CORTES
Won't even let us see their dead.

Slowly, cautiously, the Spaniards tend to their fallen comrades.

CUT TO:

EXT. SPANISH CAMP. EVENING.

Cortes (the ever-watchful father), Marina, and Sandoval walk through camp. They pass men repairing crossbows...making arrows...

Small carcasses being roasted on a spit...

DIAZ (V.O.)

For the third straight night, we had nothing to eat except a few small dogs, and a handful of native figs.

Nearby, a small pot boils. Men dip rags into it and apply the rags to their wounds.

DIAZ (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Every one of was injured. To cauterize our wounds we had to use fat cut from one of the few Indians carcasses we were able to retrieve.

A few Soldiers seem disgusted by the human fat in the pot...

Suddenly A SENTRY calls in the distance.

The men rush to their weapons -

MARINA

Indians do not attack at night.

CORTES

They only have to do it once.

The Men relax as they see:

A LONE INDIAN walking toward them waving a flag.

Cortes and Marina step forward to meet him. The messenger speaks:

MARINA

"Xicotencatl The Younger says:
'If you are tired of fighting, you may come to Tlascala in peace ...and your flesh will be hacked from your bodies and spiced with chilies and eaten with pleasure.'"

CORTES

Tell Xicotencatl: a scared man speaks.
A brave man acts.
I will meet him tomorrow.

The messenger leaves, and Cortes moves on, passing:

Men in bedrolls, wearing their armor, sleeping fitfully or lying rigid with their eyes open.

Farther on is a tent where Father Olmeda is taking confession.

DIAZ (V.O.)
Despite the bravado of our captain,
there was hardly one of us who did
not take confession that night.

Inside the tent, a very young SOLDIER is weeping.

DIAZ (V.O.) (CONT'D)
We feared death, for we were men.

Even Olmeda's voice is quaking slightly.

CUT TO:

EXT. BATTLEFIELD. MORNING.

From a distance we see a lethal confrontation which has clearly been going on for hours. We move:

CLOSER

The Indians coming like a tidal wave, one leaping over another; too numerous to fight, too numerous even to discern. The Spanish ranks are in chaos.

DIAZ (V.O.)
At noon the following day I knew
for the first time, knew it in my
bones, that I would die in New
Spain.

The Spaniards look like they've gone down twice and are struggling for a last breath: Frantic, overwhelmed, unable to process the chaos assaulting them. It seems that soon the wave will rise again and wash the Spaniards away and only Indians will fill the plain...

But Cortes is fighting cool and strong amid the panic. He's moving in a circle, ever in a circle, looking for something we cannot see.

Suddenly he stops. Stares in one direction:

A FLAG rising above the Indians.

Cortes plunges sword first toward it:

CORTES
Here! Follow me! Here is our mark!

He heads toward a CACIQUE with a spectacular head-dress, whose servants hold the flag. We feel Cortes' will dominating those around him. Sandoval and other Hidalgos follow him...

The Indians are too tightly packed to effectively fight back. Those near the Cacique seem bewildered by Cortes' assault.

DIAZ (V.O.)
 Among so many chiefs, why did
 Cortes attack this one?

Cortes kills the Chief's servants; Sandoval stabs the Chief.

DIAZ (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 We later learned this Cacique was
 not supposed to fight, not supposed
 to be attacked. Their Gods had said
 he would lead them to victory.

The Indians around them stand back in horror and watch as Cortes'
 Page lifts the Indian banner...

DIAZ (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Their prophecy was invalidated. The
 true fate of this battle was
 revealed.

Cortes pushes onward, and the Tlascalans retreat, wailing in alarm,
 sending panic throughout their ranks...

CUT TO:

EXT. CAMP. NIGHT.

Men in armor lie in bed moaning, shivering uncontrollably, dying.

DIAZ (V.O.)
 Though we won the battle, our
 spirits were defeated. We had lost
 50 men on the campaign, others were
 dying, others had wounds where
 their arms once were.

Wounded sentries keep their hollow-eyed watch...

DIAZ (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 The next morning, the disease
 within our midst flared again.

CUT TO:

EXT. CORTES' TENT. MORNING.

Cortes and Marina emerge to find a delegation headed by:

CRISTOBAL OLID
 The men we are fighting are our
 intended allies, far weaker than
 the Aztecs, and they are defeating
 us! The idea of reaching Mexico is
 a joke. I say it; you know it: We
 cannot survive another battle!

CORTES
 (softly)
 Where will we find fewer enemies?

A strange and almost lyrical query, which silences Cristobal. Cortes looks out at the surrounding countryside:

CORTES (CONT'D)

Here in this exotic land, if we retreat or show weakness, the very stones themselves will rise against us. If the natives believe we are Gods, so must we be.

CRISTOBAL OLID

You be a God. I'm going home.

A sound. Cristobal blinks. They all peer down the road:

A delegation of unarmed Indians bearing food, wearing white badges.

MARINA

Peace. They're sending food. And porters to prepare it.

CRISTOBAL

All right.
First we eat, then we go home.

CUT TO:

EXT. LATER.

Spaniards wolfing down the food.

Tlascalans serving it. Friendly, obsequious, observant.

Cortes eats with Marina. Something on his mind...

CORTES

Didn't you say... Don't Indians sometimes send food to the enemy, so that the battle will be a fair one?

Marina nods.

CORTES (CONT'D)

So if they truly want peace, why didn't Xicotencatl come?

Marina shrugs -

CORTES (CONT'D)

Ask if they are sent by Xicotencatl the father or the son?

As she does this, Cortes observes one of the Tlascalans peering into a tent. Another has persuaded a Spaniard to show him his musket.

MARINA

He says the father has ordered
peace, and the son has sent them
here.

Cortes ponders this...stares at the man being questioned.

CORTES

Interesting distinction.
Ask if he's a spy.

Cortes watches as she translates, and the Man shakes his head.

CORTES (CONT'D)

Cut off their hands.

Velasquez de Leon and Marina look at him with alarm -

He grabs the docile Tlascalan who's serving them. The man seems
sweet, bewildered by this action.

VELASQUEZ DE LEON

What if they're not spies?

CORTES

Then I'm wrong.

He is holding the man by the wrists, staring at a nearby SOLDIER. The
Soldier hesitantly unsheathes his sword.

Cortes nods, and the Soldier brings down his sword.

CUT TO:

EXT. SPANISH CAMP. MORNING.

Before Cortes stand both Xicotencatls. They bow, touch the ground
with their hands, and kiss their hands.

MARINA

You were right about the spies.

Cortes nods, and the Chiefs rise. Xico The Younger speaks...

MARINA (CONT'D)

"I cannot defeat a man who reads my
mind."

Xicotencatl The Elder moves slowly, arms outstretched, toward Cortes.
Reluctantly Cortes allows him to touch his face... fingers slowly
patting the features; he's muttering...

MARINA (CONT'D)

"The face of a Teule..."

On the old man's face: religious ecstasy.

CUT TO:

EXT. TLASCALA. DAY.

Small ceremony: beautiful VIRGINS being presented to the Spaniards. Marina translating, something about the Indians joining their families with the Gods. We move away from this spectacle to find:

The same Young Soldier we once saw eating an orange now squats by a building. He takes sprouted orange seeds from a wet handkerchief, plants them six inches apart and two inches deep, and gently covers them with soil. This is YOUNG BERNAL DIAZ. Several Tlascalcan children are watching him. As always his voice is old, gravelly:

DIAZ (V.O.)

There were so many heroes in our campaign it is hard for me to confess that I was only a young boy. Much that I tell I saw with my own eyes, much was told me by others, some was common conjecture. I may not report everything, and some things I have forgotten because I am old, some I never knew, but as a Christian, I swear: I tell nothing I know to be false.

Coming up the road is a DELEGATION OF AZTECS.

The presentation of the Virgins ends; they go off with prominent hidalgos, who by now have several women apiece.

Cortes steps forward to meet the Aztecs, who bow, wave their copal incense, and begin the ritual presentation of gifts.

MARINA

"The great Moctezuma salutes your victory."

The Aztecs spread out jewelry and cloth embroidered with feathers, and return the gilt helmet, now filled with grains of gold. Again Cortes' Page steps forward to give an accounting:

PAGE

The jewelry is worth 1000 pesos, the helmet with gold 3000. The cloth is beautiful but worthless.

CORTES

(nods)
Bring a pen and scroll.
I will write Moctezuma a letter.

SANDOVAL

In S-Spanish?

CORTES

He will see it has meaning and know our writing is more advanced.

The Page returns with the materials and prepares to write.

CORTES (CONT'D)

Moctezuma:

I will not rest until your power is my power, your gold is my gold, your kingdom is mine to hold in my hand. I will see that all the souls in this land have given up their devilish idols and sworn devotion to the one True God.

(very intense)

Some way, some how, at whatever cost, I will achieve these things.

Silence. Other Spaniards stunned by the frankness of this message. The Aztecs watch curiously, wondering what just happened.

Cortes smiles broadly, bows, and the Aztecs relax.

CORTES (CONT'D)

(to Marina)

Translate it. "I have the greatest respect for Moctezuma, and so forth..."

As Marina begins to "translate," the Aztecs smile and gesture: some kind of invitation.

DIAZ (V.O.)

The Aztecs were scared. They knew it was time to confront us, and they did it in the slyest, most sinister way imaginable: they invited us home.

CUT TO:

EXT. TLASCALA. DAY.

An army of Spaniards and Indians ready to march. Cortes is receiving a warning/blessing from Xicotencatl the Elder.

MARINA

"Now that I know you, I know you eat food, as men do, love women, as men do, and in battle you weary, just as men do. If you go on, 100,000 men will fight you. When these are vanquished, that many again will come, and again and again until, though you be invincible, you will grow weary and die. But if you are determined to go, I will send these warriors, and also my three youngest sons, to die by your side."

The THREE YOUNGEST SONS look eager and innocent. Xicotencatl The Younger - not among the three - watches from nearby.

Xicotencatl The Elder fervently clutches Cortes' hand...

CORTES

Tell him to care for his health, so
I can see him again when we return.

As Marina translates, Cortes jumps on his horse, starts away.

The procession begins. A magnificent spectacle.

Marina walks at Cortes' side:

MARINA

I was mistaken. The Aztecs are
leading us not to Mexico, but to
their sister city, Cholula. They
say we will be well taken care of.

CORTES

What does that mean?

CUT TO:

INT. CHOLULAN PALACE. LARGE HALL. DAY.

In a corner, Martin Lopez adds Cholula to his map.

INSERT - MAP.

(See Next Page)

LARGE HALL.

Spaniards being served an enormous feast by beautiful, flirtatious
native GIRLS. The clown Cervantes peers skeptically at a dish to make
sure it does not contain human flesh.

DIAZ (V.O.)

In the religious capital of the
Aztec Federation, we were honored
by a silly and affectionate people
who showered us with flowers and
kisses, and cooked the most
exquisite delicacies.
We were in heaven.
We were in hell.

Cortes stands by the window, sometimes looking out, sometimes
watching his men.

A CHOLULAN GIRL approaches with a plate of food.

MARINA

You don't want to eat?

Cortes looks through her, not hearing the question.

CORTES

They're whores.

MARINA

What?

CORTES

The girls tending us: they're not daughters of noblemen...

CRISTOBAL

Oh relax, will you? These people are harmless fools.

Again Cortes doesn't hear. He stares out the window:

At either end of the block, pedestrians seem to be avoiding the center of the street...

CORTES

Marina: go down and see what you see.

Cristobal watches her as she leaves:

CRISTOBAL

Are you certain of her?

CORTES

More than of you.

CRISTOBAL

Think with your head, not your groin. She already betrayed her own people. Why not us?

CUT TO:

EXT. CHOLULAN STREET. DAY.

Wide clean streets, pedestrians dressed in long cloaks embroidered
Marina walks happily but keeps a keen eye.

At the end of the block she notices the peculiar walking pattern which Cortes observed from above. Moving closer, she sees:

Cloth has been spread on the ground, and dirt thrown over it.

She approaches the cloth.

Cholulans watch her silently.

Lifting the cloth, she sees a hole in the ground. Spears are pointed upward inside the hole.

She calls to a nearby PEDESTRIAN. He minces over to her with the exaggerated manners of a flamboyant homosexual. She points at the spears and asks a question. Their conversation is subtitled:

PEDESTRIAN

This is a silly thing we put here
to protect Cortes from evil
spirits.

MARINA

It would do more damage to horses
than to spirits.
Why are so few women and children
in the street?

We hadn't noticed this until she said it...

PEDESTRIAN

They are off to the mountains for
vacation.

MARINA

(sarcastic)
For their health?

She stands. As she strolls back toward the Spanish quarters, she glances idly into the sky: a hawk or other large bird circling lazily...

Her gaze skyward is interrupted by a HANDSOME WOMAN of 45 with a furtive air who grasps Marina's arm:

HANDSOME WOMAN

You must not return to the white
men.
(long beat)
My son saw you. He does not want
you to die.

MARINA

Why would I die?

HANDSOME WOMAN

Mexico has sent an army. The white
men will never leave our city
alive.

Marina kisses the woman's hand and stares gratefully into her eyes:

MARINA

Wait here. I will fetch my jewels.

Marina walks slowly toward the building where the Spanish are. We can't tell what she's thinking.

CUT TO:

INT. BANQUET ROOM. DAY.

Marina staring at Cortes... We assume this is the moment when she's deciding whether to tell him.

She starts to speak. Before she can, Cortes turns to her and indicates TWO NEARBY PAPAS:

CORTES

We leave for Mexico in the morning.
Ask them to provide us with
porters, and to have the city's
leaders in the square so we may bid
them a proper farewell.

Cortes leaves the room, going into:

AN ADJOINING ROOM.

When he closes the door, we see: the Handsome Woman bound and gagged.
Two Soldiers guard her.

CORTES

I told you before. Kill her.

CUT TO:

INT. CORTES' BEDROOM. NIGHT.

Cortes and Marina.

CORTES

Why did you tell me?
(off her silence)
This was a chance to be a hero to
your own people.

MARINA

I have no people.

CORTES

Even so -

She puts her fingers to his lips, silencing him.

MARINA

Tell yourself this: Once I was a
princess. Now, at your side, I am a
queen. Malinche. They even call you
by my name. What more could I ask?

He nods his understanding. But her expression betrays more. We sense:
the truth is, she does everything because of him.

CUT TO:

EXT. COURTYARD. DAY.

Cortes sits on his horse. Marina and Father Olmeda stand by his side.
They are surrounded by the Spanish Army.

3000 Cholulans pack the square, including Papas, Caciques, porters.
Cortes gestures to his Page, who bangs a large atabel.

Silence. His words fill it. Marina simultaneously translates:

CORTES

Dear friends. We are grateful for the extraordinary hospitality you have extended in so short a time.

Spaniards put a screen across one entrance to the square.

CORTES (CONT'D)

You have fed us, pampered us, and freely given us...your whores.

A second screen closes a second entrance. Horsemen with spears take their places in front of the screen.

CORTES (CONT'D)

We know that you are allies of Moctezuma, that you must take orders from him, and that sometimes those orders run contrary to your wishes and your own sweet nature.

The third screen is put up. Horsemen take their places.

CORTES (CONT'D)

For example, we know he has sent an army, now on the outskirts of your city, which plans to attack us with your help.

The Cholulans look around in confusion and alarm. Why is he saying this? How does he know it? Why is his tone so mild?

The screen for the fourth and last entrance to the square is stuck. TWO SOLDIERS try vainly to put it into place as:

CORTES (O.S.) (CONT'D)

And we know you have given help. You have put stakes in the street, stacked rocks on the roofs of your houses, evacuated women and children, and you intended to slaughter us, even though we are your guests.

Cortes looks at the last entrance: still open.

He waits.

Anxious silence.

CORTES (CONT'D)

I know all this, because I know everything.

The Cholulans stand in fear and in awe: this man is surely a Teule.

Forget the screen. A dozen soldiers move to fill the last entryway. When Cortes sees this is accomplished:

CORTES (CONT'D)
 Sadly, you leave us little choice.
 We are going to kill you now, all
 of you, in rightful punishment.

The Cholulans blink in disbelief -

A few turn helplessly toward the gates, but most are simply bewildered, in shock.

No one moves.

Everyone watches Cortes.

He looks slowly over the whole square...

The Cholulans contemplate their imminent death...

Beat.

Cortes nods.

Gunfire, screams, shouts...but we see only Cortes. A drop of blood flies onto his armor.

Then another.

MORE. He's getting splattered.

As the sounds of the massacre become intolerable, they fade down.

Two drops hit Cortes' face, and he closes his eyes. Serenity on his face...or perhaps denial.

A long silent beat...

DIAZ (V.O.)
 It was war. We did what we did.

Marina and Father Olmeda are also getting splattered with blood.

DIAZ (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Whatever else you say, the
 strategic value of this massacre
 was enormous. Again we appeared to
 have read the native mind, and we
 displayed a wrath so awesome it
 seemed Godlike.

Without opening his eyes, Cortes turns toward Father Olmeda:

CORTES
 If we can convert one more Indian,
 save one more soul from damnation,
 then this will have been -
 (justified)

FATHER OLMEDA
You truly believe that?

CORTES
I have to or I would go mad.
(a terrible look crosses his
face)
Don't test me, father.
Don't mock me. Ever.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROAD. DAY.

A fork in the road. Martin Lopez is adding Mexico to his map.

INSERT - MAP

(See Next Page.)

FORK IN ROAD.

Next to Cortes is a palanquin, containing an AZTEC PRINCE, bowing and gesturing..

MARINA
He says Moctezuma is embarrassed.
We were right to attack the
Cholulans, since they ignored
Moctezuma's wishes and plotted
against us.

CORTES
Does Moctezuma think I'm stupid?
(beat, re: the Prince)
What's he selling me now?

The Aztec Prince is indicating that the left fork is preferable.

Cortes smiles politely to the Prince and proceeds down the fork to the right. As they go:

CORTES (CONT'D)
(to Aztec Prince)
You must tell me, since you are a
noble lord, what the Great
Moctezuma is like.

The Aztec Prince replies:

MARINA
"I have never seen his face."

CUT TO:

EXT. HIGH MOUNTAIN TRAIL. DAY.

The army slogs along a windy mountain trail. Ahh for the warmth of a home fire...

DIAZ (V.O.)
 Remember now the furor Columbus'
 discoveries had caused throughout
 the civilized world...
 Though we were on this bleak trail
 for many reasons - to grow rich, to
 grow famous, to die young - still
 there was one desire which touched
 us all. We wanted to look over the
 mountain. We wanted to see the
 exotic new world.

Behind Cortes, Marina is riding beside Sandoval. Her manner here is formal, reserved. She simply wants the information:

MARINA
 Can you tell me something?

SANDOVAL
 I will try.

MARINA
 I know the love some mothers feel
 for their children, but what is
 this other love you Spaniards speak
 of?

SANDOVAL
 Between a man and w-woman?

MARINA
 Yes, is it desire?

SANDOVAL
 (the expert)
 More than that.
 It is pure.

MARINA
 Like love of your God?

SANDOVAL
 No, no. It makes you feel kind of
 crazy and weak and -

MARINA
 It sounds like a sickness.

SANDOVAL
 Not at all. It's just... Well:
 You know it when you have it!
 (beat)
 Do you l-love Cortes?!

Beat.

MARINA
 Please try again later, to explain.

They're cresting a hill. Cortes turns back toward them and growls:

CORTES
Are you giving her ideas?

SANDOVAL
No, sir.

A change comes over Sandoval's face.

CORTES
Then what's wrong?

Sandoval tries to speak, can't. Blinks. Shakes his head.

Cortes suddenly realizes: Sandoval sees something.

Cortes whirls -

The Valley of Mexico stretched below them:

A spectacular city filled with huge stone buildings, built on the water, connected to land by long causeways. It seems like an enchanted vision. "I do not know how to describe this first glimpse of things never heard of, seen, or dreamed of before." This is a magical realm, a kingdom from our fantasies.

The faces of the Spaniards are filled with awe.

Over the center of the city, one large bird-of-prey cuts slow circles in the azure sky...

CUT TO:

EXT. CAUSEWAY. DAY.

The Army moving along one of the dikes.

Every structure - houses, towers, pyramids - is crowded with natives. Likewise the lakes are darkened by swarms of canoes filled with Indians straining for a glimpse of these pale, outlandishly dressed strangers.

The welcome is powerful and eerie. Not warm, not triumphant, certainly not cold and antagonistic. It is wary. The inexpressive native faces heighten the feeling that we have entered an unknowable universe.

Floating on the lake are fairy islands of flowers. These mobile islands undulate as the water rises and falls.

The causeway itself is only nine yards wide, crowded with natives, and broken occasionally by bridges.

One of Xicotencatl's Sons, at Cortes' side, points to a bridge:

MARINA
"These are easily removed. Soon we will be trapped inside their city."

CORTES

(nods)

They must wonder why we look so confident.

In the distance, the royal palanquin, blazing with burnished gold, approaches. It is borne by nobles and bears a canopy of gaudy featherwork, powdered with jewels and fringed with silver.

Cortes descends from his horse.

He puts on his helmet, topped with a plume of feathers.

The canopied bier stops and slowly MOCTEZUMA descends.

Though we saw him at the opening of the film, in darkness, that glimpse did not prepare us for the spectacle we now witness:

He is magnificently clad, in a turquoise robe studded with pearls and jewels, gold sandals, and spectacular feathered headdress. Servants strew the ground with cotton tapestry, so his imperial feet do not touch the soil.

Everyone around him except the most prominent nobles has their eyes lowered: they cannot look at the "Great Speaker."

On either side of Moctezuma are princes: CUITLAHUA and CUAUHTEMOC. The CAMERA FOCUSES on one, then the other:

DIAZ (V.O.)

Two great Princes flanked Moctezuma. His brother, Cuitlahua, had sworn to be our enemy and would have caused great harm had he not died of smallpox brought by one of our soldiers. The Emperor's nephew, Cuauhtemoc, vowed he would achieve our extinction. For most of us, he kept his word.

Cuauhtemoc, only 25, has about him a sense of assurance and command usually reserved for those of far greater age. His features are long, delicate, and very grave.

Moctezuma himself is 40 years old, handsome, tall. His hair is black and straight, his beard thin, his complexion rather light. He moves with dignity, and there is great intelligence in his eyes.

DIAZ (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Moctezuma had ruled for 17 years. Once the fiercest of warriors, he was now a deeply religious man. He knew, from his reports and his oracles, that one way or another we were to be his fate.

The two leaders stare at each other.

They bow.

There is a long and magnificent silence. This moment - the meeting of two such sophisticated, and yet wildly different, civilizations - is unique in human history. Both sides simply stare in wonder...

Finally the frozen moment is broken as the Princes around Moctezuma, with seeming reluctance, touch the ground, then bring their hands to their chests and heads.

DIAZ (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Their hearts and minds welcomed us.

Cortes takes out a necklace of glass beads and puts it around Moctezuma's neck. It looks crude and plain next to the Aztec jewelry.

Then Cortes starts to embrace Moctezuma, but the other Aztec Princes rush forward and stop him. Cortes nods and steps back.

Moctezuma speaks. Marina begins to translate. Toward the end of this speech her voice FADES SOFTER as simultaneous SUBTITLES come up. Eventually her voice stops altogether, though her physical placement tells us she is still translating.

MOCTEZUMA/MARINA

O Lord, our Lord, you have arrived
in this land, your land, your own
city of Mexico, to sit on your mat,
your stool, which I have guarded
for you. Your vassals, the old
kings, my ancestors, are gone.
Would that one of them could rise
from the dead astonished and see
what my eyes truly see, for in no
dream do I see your face. Ah, these
days, five, ten, a string of days,
I have been anxious, watching for
you, waiting to see you appear from
your hidden place among the clouds
and mists. For I was told you would
appear, you would return to sit on
your mat, your stool, and it is
come true. Welcome and rest. Rest
now. Rest in your palace. With your
lords and companions, take your
rest.

Moctezuma grasps Cuitlahua's hand, turns and walks toward the city. Cuauhtemoc takes Cortes' hand, and they follow.

Cuauhtemoc is seething. Marina walks at Cortes' side:

MARINA

Moctezuma's greeting is warm. The
Great Speaker seems to see you as
the fulfillment of the ancient
prophecy, the return of the
Quetzalcoatl.

CORTES

And the others?

MARINA

They are more...cautious.

Cortes glances at the angry Cuauhtemoc.

CORTES

That's an understatement.

The CAMERA RISES slightly so that we see how small the Spanish Army looks compared to the Indian population, and the magnificence of the city.

As the Spaniards file past, Cristobal, ever paranoid, says to Alvarado:

CRISTOBAL

God help us to leave here alive.

CUT TO:

EXT. TENOCHTITLAN. THE MAIN SQUARE. DAY.

In the shadow of a giant PYRAMID (or cue), Moctezuma gestures to Cortes, indicating his own spectacular palace of silicate and alabaster, surrounded by ponds and gardens.

MARINA

This is his palace. We are to stay in the palace of his father.

He leads the Spanish procession into the building next door.

CUT TO:

INT. AXAYACATL'S (MOCTEZUMA'S FATHER'S) PALACE. DAY.

The ceilings are carved cedar, the walls hung with cotton and feather tapestries. Moctezuma leads Cortes by the hand into a

GREAT HALL

A cotton mat ornamented with gold and jewels is draped over a stool. Moctezuma gestures for Cortes to sit.

MOCTEZUMA

Your old mat, your familiar stool.

Cortes sits.

Moctezuma nods in quiet contentment.

The attitude of the other Aztecs tells us: they have never before seen anyone sit there.

Moctezuma gestures and PORTERS enter bearing trays of food.

CUT TO:

EXT. GARDEN. DAY.

With hostile civility, Cuauhtemoc leads Cortes and his hidalgos through gardens which are far less formal, but no less beautiful, than the French gardens Louis XIV would create 175 years later.

DIAZ (V.O.)

The next day Moctezuma's nephew, Cuauhtemoc, gave us a tour of Aztec wonders. At first we thought it an act of hospitality.

Fruit trees.

Borders of trellises supporting aromatic shrubs and creepers.

Riotous washes of pink and purple and lavender; subtle shadings that delight the eye and nourish the soul.

Fields of exotic, orchids: not hot-house creations but hearty flowers dancing gaudily into the distance.

Cuauhtemoc does not speak, and there is no need. The magic of Aztec reality washes over us.

A lattice of reeds covered with blooming flowers marks our passage into the

AVIARY

Cardinals, quetzales, endless species of parrots, hummingbirds... Cuauhtemoc is completely at home: as if he too were a bird.

Marina (present, as always, whenever we see Moctezuma or any of the Aztecs) seems to share this sense of peace. The Spaniards do not.

Cortes is restless, looking around... He squints. Points up:

CORTES

What's that there?

Cuauhtemoc does not even glance where Cortes is pointing. Like Moctezuma, his words are SUBTITLED.

CUAUHTEMOC

A golden eagle.

The GOLDEN EAGLE has an individual perch high over the other birds.

CORTES (V.O.)

Why is it kept separate?

CUAUHTEMOC

Our city was built here because my ancestors saw an omen on the lake: a golden eagle with a serpent in its talons, its wings spread wide to the rising sun.

Cuauhtemoc walks on, as if he wants to change the subject. Seeing this, Cortes lingers:

CORTES
A magnificent bird.

CUAUHTEMOC
We see fewer and fewer alive.

We suddenly realize: this is the same breed as the one whose dead carcass was brought to Moctezuma in the pre-credit sequence.

Leaving the aviary, we enter a

ZOO

Pumas, ocelots, alligators, etc.

CUAUHTEMOC
When we sacrifice our enemies, we
feed the torsos to these beasts.

A casual and gracefully delivered threat.

Cortes nods and follows Cuauhtemoc toward the:

SNAKE CAGES.

Various vipers, moccasins, coral snakes...

Cuauhtemoc watches keenly for Cortes' reaction.

CORTES
I don't like snakes.

Marina does not translate this. Cortes looks at her.

MARINA
The God Quetzalcoatl, in spirit
form, is half-bird, half-snake.

Cortes looks into a cage with two RATTLESNAKES.

CORTES
Open the cage.

Marina translates.

Cuauhtemoc orders it, and the cage is opened.

Cortes enters.

One of the snakes is asleep, the other looks at him warily.

MARINA
The most dangerous of vipers.

Cortes takes a step forward.

The snake starts to rattle.

MARINA (CONT'D)
This noise is a warning -

Cortes freezes. Not a muscle twitching.

The snake moves its head side to side, watching him...

Cuauhtemoc observing...

Cortes' immobility calms the snake.

Then Cortes moves. Perversity?

The snake rattles furiously -

Cortes throws his handkerchief -

The snake strikes -

At the handkerchief.

Cortes strolls calmly out of the cage.

Cuauhtemoc looks back and forth between Cortes and the snake, not quite sure what he's just witnessed...

CUT TO:

EXT. MAIN SQUARE. DAY.

Huge buildings on every side. The tour has stopped beside an immense round stone covered with markings.

DIAZ (V.O.)
Even now, 50 years later, this stone crammed with symbols of knives, houses, and rabbits, is the most accurate calendar on earth.

They walk forward, toward the giant pyramid.

Beside the cue stands a small building: its painted entrance is a dragon's mouth with sharp fangs that drip blood.

The Spaniards stare through the door/mouth and see: stacks of human skulls. Cuauhtemoc smiles, speaks:

MARINA
He says there are 136,000 skulls.
As many as 50,000 have been sacrificed in a single year.

The Spaniards stand transfixed with horror.

Cuauhtemoc gestures and they begin to climb the cue. Cuauhtemoc stays below, staring after them with undisguised contempt. Moctezuma waits for the Spaniards at the top.

DIAZ (V.O.)

We realized: this tour had been a warning. If we were not Gods, we should know we were dealing with an advanced - and lethal - civilization.

As they climb the cue, something is thrown off the top.

The Spaniards exchange looks: What was that?

After a moment, the distant action is repeated: a human body, breast ripped open and dripping blood, sails down the steps...

MARINA

Down below, butchers carve the bodies. Arms and legs are served to warriors, the rest to the lions.

Cortes shoots a glance at Father Olmeda.

TOP OF THE PYRAMID

Cortes and his men arrive, breathless. Moctezuma greets them:

MOCTEZUMA

Welcome, Malinche, to the holy place.

He leads them to a large convex stone with leather straps at the corners. It is covered with blood.

MOCTEZUMA (CONT'D)

This is our sacrificial stone.

He indicates a brazier with five still-beating hearts.

MOCTEZUMA (CONT'D)

And here we make our offerings.

CORTES

Great Moctezuma, I can contain myself no longer. I must tell you...

We see Moctezuma's face as he listens, and Cortes' voice fades down.

DIAZ (V.O.)

Our Captain calmly stated our mission: to convert the natives to Christianity. He also explained the Trinity and other mysteries which we accept on faith.

Cortes' voice fades up again:

CORTES
So that ours is the one true God.

Moctezuma nods.

MOCTEZUMA
Malinche, I am sure your God is
good to you. So are ours, to us. I
do not ask you to forsake your
beliefs. Please give to our people,
and our Gods, the same respect.

Cortes glances at the brazier -

CORTES
Didn't you hear what I said?!
This is an abomination!

FATHER OLMEDA
(quietly, calmly)
Not now, Captain.

CORTES
These "Gods" are devils!

As Cortes raises his voice to the Emperor, several Aztec Guards move as if to seize him.

Moctezuma motions for them to desist.

CORTES (CONT'D)
Let us place our Virgin here and
see how your false Gods shrink from
her!

As Marina translates, Moctezuma shakes his head sadly, and motions for his guests to leave.

MOCTEZUMA
I have committed a grave sacrilege
in bringing you here. These Gods
make the sun shine, the rain fall,
and the corn grow. I must now atone
for exposing them to such
blasphemy.

He walks away, into one of two large temples.

Cortes wants to pursue him, but Father Olmeda lays a calming hand on the Captain's shoulder...

FATHER OLMEDA
"No use to overturn the alter if
the idol remains enthroned in the
heart."

Father Olmeda leads Cortes away.

DIAZ (V.O.)
 That night we pondered Cortes'
 blunder. Would Moctezuma see that
 we could not be their Gods if we
 defiled their Gods?

CUT TO:

INT. MOCTEZUMA'S PALACE. DAY.

Clouds of incense roll toward the ceiling. Spectacular tapestries cover the walls. On the floor, beautiful gifts are laid out on mats of palm leaf. Moctezuma and Cortes sip cold cocoa.

DIAZ (V.O.)
 Despite Cortes' outburst, Moctezuma received us with great courtesy, toasting our Captain with frothy cocoa drinks. He asked jokingly to see the machines said to spew thunder and lightning.

A Page places a thick piece of wood against the wall.

Velasquez de Leon fires his gun into it.

Moctezuma is amazed and scared and tries to conceal his fear.

DIAZ (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Cortes skirted questions of religion...

CUT TO:

INT. AXAYACATL'S PALACE. CHAPEL. DAY.

The room is being cleared of Aztec articles and converted into a chapel. Crucifixes of several sizes litter the floor.

DIAZ (V.O.)
 Except to ask, most politely, if we could construct a chapel in our own quarters.

Soldiers remove a large animal skin from the wall.

Father Olmeda stares at what is revealed:

A small doorway, plastered over.

Father Olmeda runs his hand along the plaster: fresh.

FATHER OLMEDA
 Fetch Cortes.

CUT TO:

EXT. LATER

The plaster around the doorway is gone.

Velasquez de Leon inserts his sword and pries off the covering.

It falls.

Sandoval approaches with a burning torch and glances at Cortes.
Cortes nods.

Sandoval goes through the doorway -

INT. TREASURE ROOM.

Like a vision from some fairy tale: gold in nuggets and dust and grains, semi-precious stones (turquoise, jade, onyx, opals), silver, exquisite plates and metalwork combining these riches together. Piles and piles of everything. This is El Dorado.

DIAZ (V.O.)

We later learned: this wealth represented 100 years of Aztec rule. When I saw it, I knew there was nothing to compare in all the world.

The eyes of the Spaniards are wide with greed. Cortes' Page is making rapid calculations in his notebook.

Cortes is lost in reverie, fingering gold dust.

Suddenly he realizes Father Olmeda's eyes are on him.

He blinks -

Looks up -

CORTES

Am I a good Christian, Father?

FATHER OLMEDA

Good Christians don't do this work.

He says it gently, about Cortes...but his fatalistic tone indicates it may apply equally to himself.

Cortes lays the jewels down and leaves the room.

After a moment, the others follow.

CORTES

Touch nothing. Board it up as before, and put the altar in front.

As the men move the large altar toward the door -

CUT TO:

INT. SPANISH QUARTERS. DAY.

Eerie background music. AZTEC NOBLES watch:

Spanish soldiers wager greedily with cards made from drum skins. Other Spaniards stand guard.

DIAZ (V.O.)
For the next days, they watched us.

The behavior of the Spanish gamblers seems crude, uncivilized.

CUT TO:

EXT. AZTEC STREET. DAY.

A Spanish Soldier exits a public toilet built of reeds and straw.

DIAZ (V.O.)
The Mexicans, whose obsession with cleanliness extended to daily bathing and public latrines, were curious if our excrement, like that of the Gods, was gold.

As the Soldier walks away, several Young Aztecs run into the public toilet to examine what has been left.

They exit, holding their noses.

CUT TO:

INT. MOCTEZUMA'S PALACE. DAY.

Royal entertainment: Dancers, spectacular foot-jugglers...

But the two leaders seem edgy:

Moctezuma smiles at Cortes and nods.

Cortes replies in the same way. Too formal.

Long beat.

Moctezuma glances to one side.

Cortes follows the glance:

The fierce and warlike Cuauhtemoc is cracking tiny nuts with his teeth and eating them.

Cortes exchanges looks with Sandoval and Velasquez De Leon: trouble is coming...

CUT TO:

INT. SPANISH QUARTERS. NIGHT.

Cortes lying in bed beside Marina. Eyes open, worrying. Suddenly a loud knock at the door. Velasquez De Leon enters, followed by Cristobal, Alvarado, Sandoval.

VELASQUEZ DE LEON
Captain? I'm sorry to...

CORTES
What is it?

VELASQUEZ DE LEON
A messenger just arrived from Vera Cruz. Aztecs there have killed 20 of our shipmates.

Cortes nods.

Stares.

Looks around at the others.

CORTES
We must act.

SANDOVAL
Quickly.

ALVARADO
Decisively.

CORTES
Yes. Tomorrow we must save ourselves... or die in the attempt.
(long beat)
This is what I propose...

CUT TO:

EXT. MAIN SQUARE. DAY.

Cortes and a dozen men cross the square to Moctezuma's palace.

CORTES (V.O.)
Tomorrow morning will seem the same as today. A group of us will go to Moctezuma's chambers. As always, we will be fully armed.

After the first dozen, a second casually follows. Then a third.

CORTES (V.O.) (CONT'D)
For the first time, other soldiers will follow. We must hope they attract no particular notice.

The last two groups loiter outside Moctezuma's palace...

CUT TO:

INT. MOCTEZUMA'S PALACE. DAY.

The Spaniards enter, and Moctezuma nods graciously.

CORTES (V.O.)
Then, when we enter, I will -

CORTES (LIVE) (CONT'D)
Great Moctezuma, I must demand -

Moctezuma stops him with a gesture. He proceeds playfully:

MOCTEZUMA
Malinche, is this true that of the
riches I give your King, he will
receive only a fifth?

CORTES
Yes, but -

MOCTEZUMA
And you receive an equal fifth?

Cortes nods. Moctezuma proceeds with mock outrage:

MOCTEZUMA (CONT'D)
And the rest is divided among your
men?

CORTES
It's true.

Moctezuma stares gravely at Cortes and then bursts out laughing.

MOCTEZUMA
You're a very clever man!

He continues to laugh.

No one joins him.

He realizes there is tension in the air. Nods gravely.

MOCTEZUMA (CONT'D)
You have heard about 20 of your
men?

CORTES
Yes.

MOCTEZUMA
I hear it too, with shame and
sadness. I have come to think of
you as my brother, and to show my
heart has good will...

He motions and a gorgeous princess, DONA ANA, appears.

MOCTEZUMA (CONT'D)
I am giving you today my third
daughter, to be one of your wives.

For a moment Cortes is thrown off course, both by the act of generosity and the luminous beauty of this girl.

CORTES
 She is very beautiful...

Marina dutifully translates this...

CORTES (CONT'D)
 But that does not change what happened. There have been too many accidents. Until those who killed my men can be brought here and questioned, you yourself must come with us, to our quarters.

He watches Moctezuma's face as Marina translates.

Bewilderment, then shock, then outrage.

Moctezuma's eyes flash toward his GUARDS -

Because they have their eyes lowered, they do not see him.

As his mouth opens, Velasquez de Leon and Cristobal approach with swords drawn.

There is nothing Moctezuma can do. He is trapped.

He lowers his eyes. His body trembles with rage.

MOCTEZUMA
Go...as your prisoner?

CORTES
 As our guest.

MOCTEZUMA
Is this how my kindness is
rewarded?
 (anger)
When did a great prince such as
myself, ever leave his palace to
stay with strangers?!

CORTES
 You will hold court there, as always. Everything will be the same.

Moctezuma stares at Cortes.

MOCTEZUMA

Even if I should consent to such a
degradation, my subjects never
would. I remain here.

VELASQUEZ DE LEON

Then let the barbarian die! Now!

Beat. Moctezuma looks at Marina.

Marina looks at Cortes: translate?

He nods, and she translates.

Moctezuma stares at Cortes. Expressionless, but thinking...

Finally he smiles. And stands. Paradoxically, he seem stronger, more imperious... He gestures toward the door:

MOCTEZUMA

Let us go then to the palace of my
father and see what destiny awaits.

CUT TO:

EXT. MAIN SQUARE. DAY.

Moctezuma walks, escorted, across the square to Axayacatl's palace.

DIAZ (V.O.)

Cortes warned that our victory was temporary. We would still have to fight the Aztecs, and the conflict would be savage, and soon.

Moctezuma's posture is straight, proud, bewildering.

CUT TO:

INT. AXAYACATL'S PALACE. DAY.

Young Bernal Diaz sits making marks on an Aztec scroll using an Aztec "pencil."

Cortes walks by. Stops. Looks. Looks again.

CORTES

What are you doing?

YOUNG DIAZ

Making notes. So I can remember.

CORTES

For what purpose?

YOUNG DIAZ

So I can tell my grandchildren.

Cortes stares at him. Not with thought, but with a kind of realization. A mystical moment.

CORTES
No. So you can tell the world.
(long beat)
That is, if you live.

He laughs and walks away.

Young Diaz looks after him, then looks down again at his notes. But now he's looking at them in a different way...

CUT TO:

INT. AXAYACATL'S PALACE. COUNCIL ROOM. DAY.

Moctezuma on his mat stroking his python. Surrounding him are five PAPAS. In the center is a statue of a grotesque Aztec God.

DIAZ (V.O.)
We kept our word. Outwardly nothing
changed except the location of
Moctezuma's court.

Across the vast room, Cortes chats with Sandoval as Marina watches:

Something about the posture of the Aztecs, their ritualized movements and attitudes, is dissonant, unsettling, impenetrable. A SERVANT interrupts their conference, and Moctezuma glares at him.

The Servant says something more, and Moctezuma's expression softens. He nods.

In response, ANOTHER PAPA enters, carrying a dead golden eagle.

When he sees this, Moctezuma growls fiercely and the entering Papa retreats. Simultaneously: Cuauhtemoc rises and begins to speak.

Cortes turns to Marina:

CORTES
What's going on?

She shakes her head, watching intently as:

Cuauhtemoc argues with considerable passion.

CORTES (CONT'D)
You can't possibly hear them.

She makes no reply, watches:

Moctezuma gestures, and Cuauhtemoc bows, starts for the door -

MARINA
They are taught perfect elocution.
You can read their lips.
(without pause)
(MORE)

MARINA (CONT'D)
 Moctezuma's nephew, Cuauhtemoc,
 just begged the Emperor to kill us.

CORTES
 Moctezuma listened?

MARINA
 He had to. Cuauhtemoc is a
 potential heir to the throne.

CORTES
 (to Sandoval)
 Follow Cuauhtemoc and arrest him.

Sandoval starts after Cuauhtemoc, motioning to SEVERAL SOLDIERS to accompany him. Cuauhtemoc is still visible down the long hallway, and we see the Spaniards quickly closing in for the arrest.

Cortes looks at Marina...hesitates...

CORTES (CONT'D)
 I'm going to sleep with Moctezuma's
 daughter tonight.

MARINA
 She is young and pretty.

CORTES
 You're not jealous?

MARINA
 Don't insult me.

Cortes looks her over as if for the first time: profound admiration.

CORTES
 You are remarkable.

MARINA
 No. But I am here first, and I will
 bear your child.

He stares.

CORTES
 Oh.

Beat.

MARINA
 You're not happy?

CORTES
 I'm always happy.

He doesn't look it.

He realizes some other response is required.

CORTES (CONT'D)
 And I am proud to have you as the
 mother of my child.
 (intense, to himself)
 May it be a son!

Hardly the reaction she wanted. As she swallows her disappointment:

CUT TO:

EXT. MAIN SQUARE. NIGHT.

Aztecs watch in bewilderment as Spaniards pile wood and weapons
 (spears, arrows, lances) in the center of the square.

DIAZ (V.O.)
 A few days later, those who killed
 20 of our men were brought to
 Tenochtitlan.

Seventeen bound Aztecs are led out of Axayacatl's Palace and tied to
 the top of the wood pile.

DIAZ (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 According to Cortes, they said they
 were acting on Moctezuma's orders.
 The Aztecs claimed we
 misunderstood.

As Mexican pedestrians look on in astonishment, Moctezuma is led onto
 a balcony in shackles.

His eyes are lowered in shame.

The pyre is lit.

The condemned men start to burn.

Moctezuma watches...

Cortes steps to Moctezuma's side.

Moctezuma senses him, but does not look at him.

MOCTEZUMA
So...you sacrifice your enemies
after all.

Cortes blinks.

MOCTEZUMA (CONT'D)
I was talking to your priest. He
tells me your God commanded Abraham
to sacrifice his son Isaac.
 (finally looks at Cortes)
And was not Jesus himself
sacrificed by your God?

Hold on Cortes' reaction -

CUT TO:

INT. SPANISH QUARTERS. DAY.

Cortes and Moctezuma play an Aztec dice game, throwing smooth gold pellets and slabs across the room. The two men seem cheerful, relaxed, the best of friends.

DIAZ (V.O.)

Moctezuma was unchained after the burnings, and he was different. Was he hiding something? Waiting? He seemed to have a hidden faith that somehow his Gods would release him from this indignity.

A brief pause in the game. We catch Moctezuma staring at Cortes. The look on his face is completely inscrutable.

CUT TO:

EXT. TENOCHTITLAN. STREETS. DAY.

Cortes and Marina walking, with Cristobal and Alvarado behind them. The streets are crowded with Indians who keep glancing in one direction, as if waiting for something.

DIAZ (V.O.)

We enjoyed the city. We relaxed. And every time we did, we saw something that chilled our hearts.

CRISTOBAL

No, no, no. I don't think there is - or should be - any limit to the number of women a man can have. In Arabia -

They stop. A noise. A procession approaching.

The Aztecs around them start to weep.

ALVARADO

What? What is it?

The Spaniards group together, watching as:

Six Children are borne through the streets. They are weeping profusely.

The Aztec pedestrians are weeping with equal abandon.

MARINA

They believe the tears of the children bring rain, so the crops will grow.

CRISTOBAL
Then...this is theatre?

MARINA
No.
The children are sacrificed.

All the Spaniards stare in disbelief.

CUT TO:

INT. SPANISH QUARTERS. HUGE RECEPTION ROOM. DAY.

Two Aztec clowns are putting on a raucous performance...

Moctezuma in full finery, sits on his mat next to Cortes. With a wave of his hand he dismisses the clowns and turns to Cortes.

MOCTEZUMA
Now. I have a surprise for you.

He motions again, and AZTEC PRINCES come forward and proffer gifts.

CORTES
What is this?

MOCTEZUMA
What you asked. Our chiefs are
declaring loyalty to King Carlos.

The line of chiefs goes on across the room and out the door...and the riches they hold are staggering...

CUT TO:

INT. CHAPEL. DAY.

The treasure room door has been reopened, and Spanish troops are bringing out the booty. Fully displayed, it is even more dazzling. Cortes' Page is noting everything, with its value, in a book.

DIAZ (V.O.)
Moctezuma also told us of the
secret treasure room and freely
gave us its contents.

Some of the loot is being carried through the room, out onto:

A LARGE ROOF TERRACE

Where the stones are being removed from the exquisite gold jewelry and the gold melted down into ingots.

DIAZ (V.O.)
We melted down their jewelry, so
the gold would be easier to
transport.

INT. RECEPTION ROOM. (NOTE THAT ALL ROOMS LOOK ALIKE.)

Moctezuma and Cortes sit on mats examining the treasure as it is piled before them. Again Cortes' Page takes notes.

DIAZ (V.O.)
Perhaps Moctezuma hoped if we had
all his wealth we would go home.

Moctezuma watches as Cortes argues quietly with Velasquez De Leon:

VELASQUEZ DE LEON
But why?! We've conquered Mexico!
Their power, revenues, and loyalty
have been given us without a single
blow being struck!

CORTES
Do we seek only power, riches?
(turning to Moctezuma)
My Lord, there is one more thing I
must ask.

MOCTEZUMA
I will grant it.

CORTES
My men are not content with our
chapel. We beg permission to remove
your Gods from the top of the
pyramid and put our Lady in their
place.

Moctezuma stares at Cortes.

MOCTEZUMA
Do you love war?

Cortes is taken aback -

MOCTEZUMA (CONT'D)
My Gods and my people will rise.

CORTES
Even one temple might do.
Besides...we will take it
regardless of your answer.

Moctezuma stares at Cortes...

MOCTEZUMA
(measured, a threat)
Then I give my permission.

CUT TO:

INT. AZTEC TEMPLE. NIGHT.

Cortes stares up at Huitzilopochtli, the fat Aztec war God. Broad cheeks, terrible eyes, girdled with hissing snakes.

Cortes extends his hand. An iron bar is placed in it.

CORTES
Make it clean.

He leaps onto the idol and begins SMASHING it. This is no simple demolition. This is RAGE. FURY. MADNESS.

At first others join in, but the pace and intensity of their leader's assault distracts them. They stop and stare.

At Father Olmeda's side, Velasquez de Leon shakes his head.

FATHER OLMEDA
Yes. This goes beyond faith.

VELASQUEZ DE LEON
Perhaps...the slaughter in Cholula,
burning those people alive... Does
he feel some remorse?

FATHER OLMEDA
No. This is about his greatness.

Cortes' anger is both scary and awe-inspiring...

FATHER OLMEDA (CONT'D)
If he truly had faith, he would
accept himself as a gift from God.

CUT TO:

EXT. TOP OF PYRAMID. DAY.

Spaniards filing into one large building, Aztecs into the other.

DIAZ (V.O.)
So it was that for a few days an
Aztec temple and Christian church
stood side by side, in peace.

INTERCUT the two ceremonies:

- Father Olmeda waving incense.

- Aztecs waving incense as they lead a BEAUTIFUL BOY, 19, up the steps of the pyramid. He is surrounded by gorgeous YOUNG WOMEN.

DIAZ (V.O.) (CONT'D)
For the past year, this beautiful
boy had been fed the most exquisite
food, tended to by the most
beautiful girls, and lived a life
of hedonistic joy.
(MORE)

Today, ^{DIAZ (CONT'D)}intoxicated with mushrooms,
he would die so that the sun would
continue to move in the heavens.

He looks deliriously happy. Smiling, waving to the crowd. Subtly,
underneath, we HEAR the sound of his HEARTBEAT...

- On the wall of the Catholic "church" hangs a deeply somber painting of the baby Jesus surrounded by Joseph and Mary.
- The Beautiful Boy walks onto the sacrificial stone and raises his arms in exultation. The Aztecs cheer.
- Father Olmeda stands at the pulpit. Behind him: a large CRUCIFIX. Jesus' hands and feet are tightly bound to the cross.
- Atop the sacrificial stone, the Beautiful Boy's hands and feet are held by four Papas. The Chief Papa raises his knife...
- Father Olmeda begins communion. On the crucifix: Jesus grimacing.
- Smile on the face of the Beautiful Boy.
- This Crucifix is gory. A spear lances Jesus' chest: blood gushes.
- The sacrificial knife cuts: blood flowing from the Beautiful Boy's chest. The rich red liquid flows off the stone into a cup...
- Red wine in Father Olmeda's cup as he holds it to Cortes' lips...
- The palpitating heart is placed in the brazier.
- The wafer is put into Cortes' mouth.
- The Beautiful Boy's body is thrown down the side of the Pyramid to the Butchers who wait below. The Crowds cheer happily.
- Communion continues: soberly feasting on the "body" of Christ. Moctezuma watches from the rear as Cortes walks up the aisle...

He steps in Cortes' path -

Cortes looks at him with surprise: how dare you interrupt my mass?

MOCTEZUMA
At least we kill and eat our
enemies... even our selves...but
not our Gods!

He laughs derisively and walks away.

CUT TO:

INT. SPANISH QUARTERS. MOCTEZUMA'S COURT. DAY.

Through the window we see: the square filled with protesting Aztecs,
incited by a group of Papas. Drawing back inside:

Moctezuma sits surrounded by enraged Priests. His attitude and posture tell us that his power has returned.

On the mat in front of him is a pile of green wilted corn: bad omen.

MOCTEZUMA

The Gods are outraged.
The People are in arms.
Leave at once, or you will die.

CORTES

My Lord, we would be pleased to go, but have no means. As you know, our ships were rotten and had to be sunk.

MOCTEZUMA

(smiles)
But - how lucky - new ships have arrived!

He unfolds an Aztec scroll which shows several large vessels.

MOCTEZUMA (CONT'D)

Spaniards!

Cortes stares at the scroll.

CORTES

Blessed be the Redeemer for his mercies. Can you tell, from this scroll, how many men have come?

MOCTEZUMA

Thirteen hundred.

CORTES

And who is their leader?

MOCTEZUMA

A man named "Narvaez."

Cortes stares at Moctezuma...

CORTES

If you knows his name, then your men made contact with him.

Moctezuma stares at Cortes, and then, very slowly, smiles.

CORTES (CONT'D)

What sort of contact?

Beat. Moctezuma is now confident, imperial again:

MOCTEZUMA
The God Smoking Mirror loves to
play tricks on us all.

CUT TO:

INT. CORTES ROOM. NIGHT.

A conference of the chief hidalgos.

VELASQUEZ DE LEON
 Narvaez is sent by my cousin
 Velasquez to quell our mutiny.
 (off Cortes' look)
 But we are right to mutiny.
History is on our side.

CRISTOBAL
 Screw history. Narvaez has fresh
 men, fresh horses -

SANDOVAL
 And if Moctezuma is in contact with
 him, they must have made a deal.

CORTES
 Yes. Moctezuma has waited
 patiently, with great confidence,
 for the tide to shift. And now it
 has.
 (long beat)
 We have only one advantage.
 (off their looks)
 They both expect us to lose.

CRISTOBAL
 That's an advantage?!

CORTES
 We leave tonight. Alvarado will
 remain in charge of the garrison. I
 will take 70 men to the sea.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROAD. NIGHT.

Fast and forced march.

Only it isn't a "march." The men are running.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROAD. DAY.

Foot soldiers trotting, the five horses walking.

A foot soldier, tiring, pats the leg of a horseman, and they trade places.

DIAZ (V.O.)
Speed was our only ally, surprise
our only weapon.

Suddenly the company stops, peers into: a deep ravine. They look in both directions: the ravine finally closes miles away...

CRISTOBAL OLID
Horses can be round in an hour, but
those on foot will lose half a day.

Cortes shakes his head; no good. He stares at the ravine: 25 feet wide, no way to cross it...

CORTES
Send the horses on.

The others look at him skeptically. He addresses Sandoval:

CORTES (CONT'D)
Go.

Sandoval kicks his horse, and the other four ride after him.

CRISTOBAL OLID
But how do we cross?

CORTES
I don't know.

CRISTOBAL OLID
You don't - (know?! Are you
crazy?!)

CORTES
Some kind of bridge?

VELASQUEZ DE LEON
But what would we make it of?

Again Cortes looks up and down the ravine.

CORTES
Maybe the bridge is already here...

A HUNDRED YARDS AWAY

They stare at a huge sycamore tree five feet in diameter.

CRISTOBAL OLID
With swords? It would take half a
day to cut it down...

Cortes shakes his head: Cristobal doesn't get it."

Then Cristobal follows Cortes' gaze...up into the branches of the tree:

A hundred feet off the ground, the branches approach those of a sister tree from the other side of the ravine.

Cristobal gives Cortes a look: are you criminally insane?

CORTES
Volunteers?

None. Just as he expected.

He starts to climb the tree.

CRISTOBAL OLID
You're not scared of heights?

CORTES
No.
It's falling from heights I don't
like.

MINUTES LATER.

Cortes climbing quickly...

Too quickly. He grabs a branch where wet leaves are resting -

Loses his grip -

Plunges six feet, landing on another branch with terrific force and almost falling to his death.

He lies there. Heaves a big sigh. Calls to those below:

CORTES
Just a few ribs.

Starts to climb again.

As he does, the wind comes up, and the branches begin to sway.

Down below, Cristobal watches with Velasquez de Leon:

CRISTOBAL OLID
If he falls, we can return to Cuba.

VELASQUEZ DE LEON
To hell with Cuba!

Cristobal looks surprised at his vehemence.

VELASQUEZ DE LEON (CONT'D)
Stop your whining.
You have five women, a fortune in
gold, and you're having the time of
your life.

CRISTOBAL OLID
 True enough.
 (beat)
 But I can complain if I want to.

VELASQUEZ DE LEON
 (looking up)
 Holy Mother of God...

Cortes nears the top. Ties a rope to the tree he's in.

The wind is strong. The pinnacle swaying back and forth...branches approaching the sister tree, then pulling away...

Approaching...pulling away...

Cortes has to make his leap at precisely the right instant...

He's terrified. Prepares to leap, then stops himself. Realizing:

CORTES
 If you're scared, you'll fall.

He takes a deep breath.

Looks down at the others.

Waves. Grins. This is not a moment for sanity.

He looks back at the waving trees.

CORTES (CONT'D)
 What the hell.

Rope tied to his waist, he rocks with the tree, preparing to jump -
 Velasquez de Leon crosses himself.

Cortes SCREAMS at the top of his lungs, LEAPS -

Fails to catch his branch -

Falls...

Grabs another branch which breaks his fall, but can't hold on -

Falls again and finally latches on, two hands gripping tight. Tendons white, sick grimace on his face.

He closes his eyes with relief: made it.

MINUTES LATER

The rope is now strung from the top of the first tree to where Cortes landed in the second, so that others can traverse the ravine without jumping. The last man, Cristobal, moves gingerly across...

CORTES
Hurry, the horses!

Dust in the distance.

100 YARDS AWAY. MINUTES LATER.

As the horses ride up, the foot soldiers wait directly across from where Sandoval left them. The sycamore trees sway in the distance.

Sandoval stops...stares...looks around dumfounded...

CORTES
We flew.

Sandoval nods. Of course.

CORTES (CONT'D)
Let's go.

The horses walk, the men trot.

CUT TO:

EXT. CAMP. NIGHT.

Tents sitting in the rain.

DIAZ (V.O.)
We reached the sea in 23 hours and sent on Father Olmeda and Martin Lopez, posing as messengers bearing a letter of conciliation. We hoped to thus distract Narvaez from our purpose.

The rain is savage. Most tents are dark, but one is well-lit. Approaching the doorway...

INT. CORTES' TENT. NIGHT.

Cortes pacing anxiously,

Sandoval enters, looking very worried.

SANDOVAL
A m-messenger, sir.

CORTES
From Father Olmeda and -

SANDOVAL
No. From T-T-Tenoch -

CORTES
If it's bad news, say it!

SANDOVAL

Alvarado believed the Mexicans were about to attack. He struck first, during one of their festivals, and slaughtered them. The entire city is now counter-attacking our garrison.

Cortes stares at him thoughtfully...

CORTES

Perhaps this was Moctezuma's plan, with Narvaez. Divide and conquer.

SANDOVAL

(quite concerned)
W-w-what are we going to do?

CORTES

(calm, almost amused:)
Well... I guess we better defeat Narvaez, don't you think?
(leans back, closes his eyes)
Wake me when Father Olmeda and Martin Lopez return.

CUT TO:

INT. CORTES' TENT. LATER.

Martin Lopez marking Xs on a map:

MARTIN LOPEZ

Sentry. Sentry. And Narvaez is here, on top of the cue.

CORTES

His men?

FATHER OLMEDA

Adventurers. They have little loyalty to him and great interest in you and your gold.

CORTES

How far is it?

MARTIN LOPEZ

Without rain, an hour's journey.

CORTES

And now?

They look out at the downpour: only fools would...

CUT TO:

EXT. ROAD. NIGHT.

Miserable march through thick rain. No trotting now. Cortes, Cristobal, and Sandoval walk in front.

CRISTOBAL OLID
 (to Sandoval)
 Yes. I had a cat once too...
 But it died.

SANDOVAL
 That's too bad, I -

CRISTOBAL OLID
 I strangled it.

SANDOVAL
 Oh.

CRISTOBAL OLID
 I had good reason.

Cortes stops, falls to his knees.

CRISTOBAL OLID (CONT'D)
 What now?!
 Sandoval joins Cortes. Cristobal sees:

The small cross erected when they left Cempoala.

CRISTOBAL
 How could we find this? In the
 dark, the rain?

He kneels too. Sandoval speaks their thought:

SANDOVAL
 Because Our Lord favors us.

CUT TO:

EXT. NARVAEZ' CAMP. NIGHT.

The rain has almost stopped. From a distance, Cortes and his men look at the size of the camp, the number of tents. It appears they have no chance. Cortes motions with his head: let's go.

INSIDE THE CAMP.

A SENTRY turns to look the other way, and ten of Cortes' men scurry into camp.

When the Sentry turns back, he sees two clusters of men walking casually. Cortes waves to the Sentry and calls:

CORTES
 Saint Iago! Down with Cortes!

The Sentry waves to them -

INSIDE A TENT ON TOP OF A CUE

NARVAEZ (42, swarthy, muscular) is making love to an Indian woman.
PULL BACK OUT of the tent, focus on:

CORTES' GROUP.

As they spot the light from Narvaez' tent, and stealthily approach the pyramid. Sandoval and four other men run up the steps from the other direction. Suddenly nearby voices call:

VOICES

To arms! We're being attacked!

Cortes and his men raise their muskets and fire.

Other rifles go off simultaneously.

Sandoval's group sprints up the cue.

Narvaez's men rush from their tents, fumbling with their rifles, and are quickly taken prisoner.

CORTES

Cortes! Victory to Cortes!

His men take up the chant, reloading their rifles and firing them into the air -

INSIDE HIS TENT

Narvaez trying to untangle himself from his amorous lover. Grabbing for some kind of clothing -

OUTSIDE

From every side, Cortes' men are firing into the air.

Meanwhile: fireflies are blinking in the distance.

Narvaez's men hear the musket shots, see the fireflies...

DIAZ (V.O.)

Narvaez' men mistook the blinking fireflies for our muskets and thought we had somehow mustered a huge force.

Cortes and Sandoval, from opposite sides, are climbing the cue. Hand-to-hand combat.

They reach the top as a silhouette in a nightshirt runs from his tent out into the darkness and is attacked from two sides. He clutches his face -

NARVAEZ

Santa Maria, help me! They have
killed me and put out my eye!

SANDOVAL

V-victory! V-victory for Cortes!
Narvaez is dead!

Down below, Cortes' men take up the chant: "Narvaez is dead!" The cry
echoes across the camp.

CUT TO:

EXT. NARVAEZ' CAMP. MORNING.

Cortes sits in an orange gown receiving homage from Narvaez' troops.
He offers his hand imperiously for them to kiss.

DIAZ (V.O.)

Narvaez was not dead. His
humiliation was completed in the
morning when he saw our meager
forces.

Narvaez sits nearby. He is now wearing an eye patch.

NARVAEZ

Thank your evil luck for putting me
into your power so easily.

CORTES

I have much to be thankful for, but
this is the least of my
achievements.

Cortes gives each of Narvaez' men a small sack. At a moment when no-
one else is in hearing, Cortes explains to Sandoval:

CORTES (CONT'D)

The gold is to keep these
mercenaries from having second
thoughts.

Nearby, two of Cortes' men - Villafana (a common soldier with a
distinctive scar who we saw on the docks in Cuba) and his COHORT
watch with barely concealed rage.

SANDOVAL

But our own men have received
nothing, These gifts will -

CORTES

Exactly.
(to Villafana and Cohort)
What sort of soldiers follow a man
like Narvaez? Do they fight for
glory or God? No. Only for gold.

VILLAFANA

I am the same.

CORTES

Good. You shall have the gold you dream of.

(giving him a small sack)

Lots of it. And we shall use these (indicates Narvaez' men) cousins of ours to get it.

A SOLDIER on horseback rides up furiously, hands Cortes a message. Sandoval watches as Cortes reads the message with grave concern -

SANDOVAL

Our garrison?

CORTES

The Aztecs stopped their attack. Why?

He rises, conceals his concern, and announces cheerfully:

CORTES (CONT'D)

Men! Let us march to Tenochtitlan and show our recruits how much the Aztecs love us.

CUT TO:

EXT. TENOCHTITLAN. DAY.

The expanded Spanish Army walking along a causeway.

Like a neutron bomb landed: No Indians in sight.

In the distance, a single canoe skims the water. Ominous.

Cortes and Sandoval exchanged worried looks.

Some of the bridges which connected other dikes have been destroyed. Clear implication: the Spaniards will have to fight their way out.

SANDOVAL

P-perhaps the last message we received was a trick?

As they cross one of the bridges, a horse falls.

The caravan stops.

Cortes trots back to examine the animal. Leg broken, it will have to be destroyed.

Botello, the exotic little man who was throwing tarot on the ship, mutters something. Cortes glowers in his direction:

CORTES

What did you say?

BOTELLO

I don't care if you hate me. I speak the truth. This is a bad omen.

CORTES

In a deserted city, you need a spastic horse to tell you something is wrong?

Botello gestures derisively and retreats.

Cortes stares at the horse.

CORTES (CONT'D)

Shoot it.

The order carried out.

Cortes looks anxiously toward Tenochtitlan.

Silence... Cortes begins to fidget... He and Sandoval exchange another look...

Finally we hear a shot fired in reply.

Cortes spurs his horse and they move on.

CUT TO:

EXT. MAIN SQUARE. DAY.

Cortes and his men enter.

The square is empty except FOUR MEXICA, each standing in a corner, dripping blood.

Cortes and company look at the Mexica with mounting horror as they realize:

The reason they drip blood is because they are wearing the skins of slaughtered men.

Cortes turns to Marina:

CORTES

This is intended to scare us?

MARINA

No. It's one of their rituals.
The Ceremony of the Flayed Men.

Cortes nods. Stares again at the four men...

Barely overcoming his horror, he kicks his horse and moves on:

Alvarado rushes out to meet him.

CORTES
How are your troops?

ALVARADO
No food. No water.

Moctezuma is approaching.

Cortes dismounts and walks right past him.

On Moctezuma's face: rage, then sadness, confusion; and again rage.

MOCTEZUMA
Is this the reward I get for
calling off my men and preventing
the slaughter of yours?

CORTES
You prefer to kill us slowly,
cutting off food and water?

MOCTEZUMA
I am helpless to change these
things when I am your captive.

CORTES
Aren't you the Great Moctezuma?

Long beat. They stare at each other.

MOCTEZUMA
If you wish our markets reopened,
you must release my nephew
Cuauhtemoc.

CORTES
He hates all Spaniards.

MOCTEZUMA
He is married to my youngest
daughter, he is in line for the
throne, and he will obey the
emperor.

Cortes considers this, finally turns to De Leon:

CORTES
Order it done.
(stares at Moctezuma...)
When I was gone, why did you save
my men?
(off Moctezuma's stare)
You feared for your life?

MOCTEZUMA
The greatest honor for a warrior is
to die in combat. May that be my
fate.

CORTES
Then why?

MOCTEZUMA
Because you, Cortes, are a most
remarkable...being.

It seems an unequivocal statement of admiration and awe. Then:

MOCTEZUMA (CONT'D)
I wanted to make sure you came
back.

He smiles, with an ominous hint of triumph...

CUT TO:

INT. CORTES' QUARTERS. DAY.

Alvarado talking as Cortes stares out the window.

ALVARADO
...our spies said they were
planning to attack, so I struck
first...

Cortes watches as Cuauhtemoc is released from the Spanish palace and walks across the square.

As Cuauhtemoc passes TWO WOMEN, they lower their eyes deferentially.
They will not look at his face.

Cortes frowns: what does this mean?

ALVARADO (O.S.) (CONT'D)
So you see? I had no choice.

CORTES
(whirls)
Choice?! This was their festival,
during which they NEVER wage war!

ALVARADO
I caught them by surprise -

CORTES
They outnumber us a thousand to
one! The one thing you were not to
do was provoke their wrath!

ALVARADO
Yes sir.

CORTES
You are a great soldier, Alvarado,
with the brain of a crustacean.
When we return to battle, you will
fight in the most precarious
position.

ALVARADO
 (grins)
 Sounds good to me.

CORTES
 Get out of here!

Alvarado leaves.

Cortes stares after him. Then he looks again out the window.

Cuauhtemoc no longer visible. Just a few Aztecs...

CORTES (CONT'D)
 I should have left Velasquez de
 Leon in charge.

We think he's talking to an empty room.

CORTES (CONT'D)
 He's the only man I have who's not
 a child.

Marina approaches him. At her touch, his speech becomes gentler, more affectionate.

CORTES (CONT'D)
 But the children are so simple.
 (glance after Alvarado)
 One must never blame them for being
 themselves.

MARINA
 What worries you?

CORTES
 (scornful)
 Worried?
 (stops... thinks...)
 That I've led them all to
 slaughter.

CUT TO:

INT. SPANISH QUARTERS. NIGHT.

Diaz, the Young Soldier who planted the orange pips, lies asleep in his bedroll, fully armed. His face peaceful, almost innocent.

DIAZ (V.O.)
 Even when this campaign was over, I
 always slept on the floor, in my
 clothes. I grew used to it, and for
 years after I never lay down in a
bed unless there was a woman in it.

A commotion nearby; soldiers run and shout. Diaz does not wake until:

A flaming arrow pierces the air and lands on Young Diaz' bedroll. It bursts into flames.

He leaps up and stamps it out.

Around him, other soldiers jump to arms -

CUT TO:

EXT. MOCTEZUMA'S ROOF. NIGHT.

As Cortes and Marina approach, Moctezuma stands watching the battle and stroking his python...

MOCTEZUMA

It is my shame I am here with you
and not there, leading my people.

CORTES

Who is the warrior who leads them?

MOCTEZUMA

(knowing the answer)
Where?

Cortes points to a dynamic Chieftain exhorting his troops...

MOCTEZUMA (CONT'D)

You don't recognize my nephew
Cuauhtemoc, who you just released?!

CORTES

You told me he would open the
markets.

MOCTEZUMA

He has. To our people.

CORTES

You said he would obey the emperor.

MOCTEZUMA

He does.
As of now, he is the emperor.

Enraged, Cortes stalks out of the room -

CUT TO:

EXT. MAIN SQUARE. DAY.

Spaniards burst out of Axayacatl's palace and are quickly driven back by TZILACATZIN, a giant Aztec slingshot artist, and others.

DIAZ (V.O.)

Moctezuma's gentle manners had not
prepared us for this battle.

(MORE)

DIAZ (CONT'D)
 Slow to rouse, the Aztecs were even
 more difficult to pacify.

CUT TO:

INT. SPANISH QUARTERS. DAY.

Flaming arrows, Indians leaping through windows, smoke so thick we can hardly see. Guns fire, swords slice the air; a vision of hell.

DIAZ (V.O.)
 They suffered great casualties, but
 when we sued for peace, they told
 us 25,000 of their number could die
 for every Spaniard and they would
 be content.

CUT TO:

INT. MOCTEZUMA'S CHAMBERS. DAY.

Father Olmeda with Moctezuma.

DIAZ (V.O.)
 Their love of death terrified us,
 so we appealed to Moctezuma to end
 the bloodshed.

MOCTEZUMA
I desire only to die.

FATHER OLMEDA
 (gently)
 But must all your people, and ours,
 die with you?

Moctezuma stares at him.

FATHER OLMEDA (CONT'D)
 Allow us to leave in peace, and we
 will never return.

Long beat.

Moctezuma stares at Father Olmeda.

MOCTEZUMA
I understand more than you think.

Father Olmeda is about to question this enigmatic reply when Moctezuma rises slowly to his feet.

CUT TO:

EXT. AXAYACATL'S PALACE. DAY.

The battle rages. Cortes and Marina watch:

Moctezuma walks onto a rooftop, dressed in his official regalia (rich loin cloth, mantle embroidered with feathers, gold decorations, turquoise ear plugs, a jade ornament piercing both nostrils, and a rock crystal tube piercing his lower lip. His face is brightly painted. The effect is bizarre but quite beautiful).

He's surrounded and protected by Spaniards.

The Aztecs stop fighting, but their attitude toward Moctezuma has changed: it's still respectful, but for the first time they look directly at his face.

MOCTEZUMA

People, my people who I love, brave people, why are you fighting? To save me? I am not a prisoner. I am already dead.

Marina translating for Cortes...

CORTES

Already... "dead?"

MOCTEZUMA

Do you want to drive away the strangers? That is not necessary. If you let them go, the strangers will leave and never return. This is their word. They give their word. Should we not believe them?

CORTES

What is he doing? What's he saying?

MOCTEZUMA

Have not the strangers always been honest and true? Go home, then. Take the word of these strangers and lay down your arms. Listen please. Listen to your emperor.

He stops. His eyes search the crowd and find Cuauhtemoc.

He nods to Cuauhtemoc.

Cortes sees it.

CUAUHTEMOC

I am the Emperor now! Listen to me! This man is a coward!

A rising swell of anger as other Aztecs shout similar insults. Cortes is enraged at this carefully staged piece of theatre.

MARINA

(to Cortes)

They are calling him a eunuch, an old woman, a sodomite for the white men.

Cuauhtemoc fires an arrow at Moctezuma. Barely misses. Other Aztecs shoot arrows, throw stones, and hurl insults -

Moctezuma stands proudly: accepting, even welcoming, the abuse.

The Spaniards Guards, taken by surprise, rush to protect him, but - Moctezuma is hit on the chest by two stones -

The giant Tzilacatzin fires his slingshot...

And hits Moctezuma on the head. He drops -

Spanish Guards hurriedly cover him up and carry him inside.

INT. PALACE. DAY.

As Moctezuma is carried in, he is brought past a glaring Cortes. Moctezuma looks up at him with a wan smile of triumph.

He is then carried into the adjoining room.

Cortes glares after him with homicidal fury, then follows him into the other room. The door closes slowly, ominously...

Hold on the door. In the b.g., we HEAR THE BATTLE RAGING...

DISSOLVE TO:

SAME DOOR, later. (BATTLE SFX, under.) Sandoval exits, announces to those who are waiting:

SANDOVAL

He's refusing all medical treatment.

DISSOLVE TO:

SAME DOOR, later. (BATTLE, under.) Velasquez De Leon exits:

VELASQUEZ DE LEON

He's refusing all food.

DISSOLVE TO:

SAME DOOR, later. Cortes' Page emerges, downcast.

CORTES' PAGE

Moctezuma is dead.

Others move forward: "What happened?", "What did he die of?", etc.

CORTES' PAGE (CONT'D)
He refused the sacraments.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. MOCTEZUMA'S QUARTERS. DAY.

Cortes and Father Olmeda hover near Moctezuma's wheezing body.

CORTES' PAGE (V.O.)
Cortes was with him to the end.

CORTES
I beg you again, Great Speaker.
(indicating Olmeda)
Before your soul is damned -

MOCTEZUMA
No. My Gods have forsaken me, but I
will not forsake them.
Besides...

He indicates Father Olmeda, who at the moment is examining with evident greed a beautiful gold necklace...

When Cortes turns back, Moctezuma gives him his hand:

MOCTEZUMA (CONT'D)
Malinche... My daughters, sweet and
fiery, are here with you. Will you
protect them?

CORTES
(touched)
Of course.
(hesitates, can't resist
asking:)
And you, can you tell me... They
say you were once a great warrior.
(off Moctezuma's nod)
Why did you never fight us?

Moctezuma smiles as if to say: Don't you know??

MOCTEZUMA
If you were a God, I dared not. If
you were what you say, ambassador
to a great King:
What kind of King would I be if I
made war on an ambassador?
(breathing more heavily...)
Besides, we Mexica fight wars to
gain captives.
(gestures)
Here in Tenochtitlan, are you not
already our prisoner?

Cortes stares at him, stunned...

Moctezuma smiles wanly...

Cortes realizing suddenly: has Moctezuma already defeated him?

Moctezuma's breath getting shorter and shorter...

ANOTHER ANGLE. MOMENTS OR MINUTES LATER.

The Page watches as:

Cortes closes Moctezuma's eyes.

INT. THE NEXT ROOM.

As Cortes' Page finishes this story.

YOUNG DIAZ
Is that really what happened?

CORTES' PAGE
Of course

YOUNG DIAZ
But...when he left here, Cortes
seemed enraged at Moctezuma...?

Cortes' Page stares at Young Bernal Diaz with a peculiar expression,
and we realize: the Page's story may be a lie.

Their attention is diverted by the sound of the raging battle -

CUT TO:

INT. SPANISH QUARTERS. DAY.

At a barricaded doorway, soldiers are firing, reloading, and firing
again without aiming their shotguns and crossbows: the Indians so
thickly massed the Spaniards can't miss.

Botello the Soothsayer stands waiting as Cortes paces the floor,
listening to the anxious report of:

VELASQUEZ DE LEON
...handful of corn per day. Without
food and clean water, we'll never
last the week.

CORTES
(turns to Botello)
You were right about the horse's
death.

BOTELLO
As always.

CORTES
If I seek your counsel, am I no
better than Moctezuma, whose world
is cursed by superstition?

BOTELLO

(snide)

A pretty question, sir. Shall I consult the stars for an answer?

CORTES

(irritable)

What is your augury now? For us?

BOTELLO

Leave tomorrow night or die.

Cortes nods thoughtfully and glances across the room, where CARPENTERS are building some kind of contraption...

VELASQUEZ DE LEON

(supporting Botello)

The Indians are still unprepared for night battle, so perhaps -

BOTELLO

It's not military tactics; it's fate.

CORTES

(growls)

Fate is something we cause, not submit to.

Father Olmeda arches an eyebrow at Cortes...

CORTES (CONT'D)

With God's mercy, of course.

FATHER OLMEDA

Of course.

CUT TO:

EXT. AXAYACATL'S CASTLE. DAY.

Battle raging.

The front doors swing open, and FOUR MEXICAN PRINCES carry out a body wrapped in turquoise cloth.

The battle stops.

The body is borne with great solemnity. Indian drums roll...

Soldiers on both sides stand silently in tribute.

Even those Aztecs who cursed and threw stones now give Moctezuma respect: let us forget failings and honor the dead.

DIAZ (V.O.)

Some say they gave Moctezuma's body royal honors;

(MORE)

DIAZ (CONT'D)
 others say they dumped him into a canal like carrion. Either way, they claim we killed him with a sword thrust up his rectum.

Moctezuma's body disappears slowly around a corner...

CUT TO:

INT. SPANISH QUARTERS. DAY.

The huge room where Moctezuma once held court is now the military command room: Cortes and the other Hidalgos are diagramming plans for their departure. A Messenger is given final instructions, and departs...

DIAZ (V.O.)
 We had to flee. To camouflage our true intentions, we sent a message asking Cuauhtemoc for peace.

Cortes' Page opens the door, and fifty Soldiers rush in. Across the room is a pile: all the treasure the Spaniards have accumulated. The Soldiers dig greedily through these riches.

CORTES' PAGE
 In all, it is worth 700,000 pesos!
 Cortes says: Take what you can. But remember: he goes safest at night who travels lightest.

The men scarcely hear him; they're stuffing their shirts with heavy gold ingots.

Across the room, the war council continues:

ALVARADO
 But Cortes wants me in the most precarious place, which is the rear.

VELASQUEZ DE LEON
 Then I must fight there too.
 (to Alvarado)
 With due respect: we cannot survive another error in judgement...

Alvarado turns toward Cortes and smiles with defiant charm:

ALVARADO
 Well? You're the Captain of the Captains.

Cortes lowers his eyes and says sadly to Velasquez de Leon:

CORTES
 We gratefully accept your offer.

CUT TO:

INT. SPANISH QUARTERS. NIGHT.

The men pack their bags and prepare for battle.

CORTES' PAGE
Two hours to departure. Two
hours...

Alvarado's warming up like a boxer: shoving the wall, grunting,
psyching himself up...

Cristobal holds hands with two of his WIVES as two others massage his
feet.

Sandoval tests the blade of his sword.

Velasquez De Leon sits in a corner. Cervantes (the blond buffoon who
Cortes found long ago sleeping on his watch) walks past -

VELASQUEZ DE LEON
Hey! You! Cervantes!

CERVANTES
Sir?

VELASQUEZ DE LEON
I have no one to drink with me.
Will you -

CERVANTES
(big grin)
Shouldn't be a problem, sir.

Velasquez de Leon hands Cervantes his bota (leather winebag).
Cervantes hoists it and sprays a stream into his mouth. Or mostly
into his mouth; he spills some onto his armor...

VELASQUEZ DE LEON
The wine is Castilian. I've been
nursing it the whole trip...

Velasquez de Leon retrieves the bota and drinks himself. Elegantly.

Lowers the bag...looks at Cervantes...

VELASQUEZ DE LEON (CONT'D)
Are you in the rear?

CERVANTES
Tonight's battle?! No sir. To be
honest, I'm something of a coward,
and I want to get out of here as
quick as I can!

Cervantes glances at the wine, hoping for another drink.

Velasquez de Leon hands him the bag.

VELASQUEZ DE LEON
 Could you carry this for me? You'll
 have a better chance of getting it
 through.

CERVANTES
 No problem, sir. No problem at all.
 And I promise I will not touch
 another drop. On my honor!

He bows obsequiously, and saunters away with the bota...

Velasquez de Leon stares. His face - placid on the surface - is so
 sad underneath that we can't bear to look at it.

We glide to where Villafana and his Cohort, who complained when
 Narvaez' men received gold, are whispering conspiratorially...

DIAZ (V.O.)
 On this night, most of us knew we
 could only survive united. But in
 the whole campaign we never took a
 step forward without being
 sabotaged from the rear.

We're now close enough to overhear:

VILLAFANA
 ...we'll only reach Cuba if Cortes
 dies.

VILLAFANA'S COHORT
 You wouldn't strike at him?

Villafana shakes his head.

VILLAFANA'S COHORT (CONT'D)
 Even in battle?

VILLAFANA
Especially in battle.
 But in battle sometimes a man's
 virtues do him in...

His Cohort is puzzled. As Villafana leans forward to explain -

CUT TO:

INT. CORTES' CHAMBERS. NIGHT.

Cortes sleeping, Marina gently rubbing his head.

She stops, looks at him.

He's spread out on the bed, shirt open, Indian feathers scattered
 around as if having been incorporated in their love-making.

Something momentous in her stoic face...

She undoes her huipil and we see her rounded belly: five months along, but very large...

Slowly, solemnly, she ties his shirt-tail to the tail of her huipil.

She places his sleeping hand over the knot.

Puts her own hand over his. (From this Aztec ritual comes the saying: "tie the knot.")

Sandoval knocks, sticks his head in.

SANDOVAL

Twenty minutes to midnight.

Marina nods. While the unwitting "groom" slept through the "ceremony," the "bride's" face streams with tears.

CUT TO:

EXT. AXAYACATL'S PALACE. NIGHT.

The doors swing silently open.

DIAZ (V.O.)

This was to be the most famous battle in our campaign. It came to be called "noche triste," the sad night.

Two Spaniards exit, look around -

The Square totally deserted.

The Two Men motion, and 40 more emerge, carrying an enormous platform (the structure we saw being constructed).

DIAZ (V.O.) (CONT'D)

We chose the shortest causeway. The bridges had been removed, so we built a mobile one to carry from one section to the next.

The platform is followed by foot soldiers, cavalry, women and porters, the Tlascalan allies, and finally the rear guard, featuring Velasquez de Leon and Alvarado.

DIAZ (V.O.) (CONT'D)

It was dark. A fine mist obscured and muffled our departure.

They enter the dike.

DIAZ (V.O.) (CONT'D)

By some miracle, or by ineptitude, the Aztecs had posted no guards.

The portable bridge is put in place and they start across it -

The land seems such a short distance away...

Cortes stares, hoping: can they really escape without a battle?

On the shore: AN AZTEC WOMAN, fetching water from the lake.

She sees them.

Stands.

Whistles.

A beat, then answering whistles.

And more. Like menacing birds -

The Spaniards race across the portable bridge -

Pirogues (the Mexican canoes) stream toward them. The white tunics of the Aztecs seem eerie, ghostlike.

Everyone has crossed the portable bridge. The PORTERS try to lift it, but it won't budge.

The great huehuetl (drum) on top of the Templo Mayor SOUNDS (and keeps sounding throughout the battle.) At that instant:

Pirogues arrive; Spaniards are showered with arrows and stones.

Suddenly, on a rooftop: the majestic Cuauhtemoc. Motionless. Staring. Then he thrusts two spears into the air. At this signal:

Enemy soldiers appear everywhere. On land, on the causeway the Spaniards are headed toward. As if the Indians were always there but only now can be seen. Shouting, whistling, banging drums.

The "portable" bridge just won't budge. The Porters fall dead under the Indian onslaught.

Word spreads among the Spaniards: "The bridge won't move."

Pandemonium. Panic. Men dive into the water and swim, only to find themselves helpless against the Indian clubs, stones, arrows -

Cavalry plunge into the water and fare little better.

Men who cannot swim grab a horse's tail and try to hitch a ride.

An Indian climbs onto the dike, grabs a soldier; they tumble back into the water. The Spaniard, helpless among so many enemies, is quickly carried away. Suddenly we recognize the captive: It is Cervantes, the buffoon with the blond beard.

Cuauhtemoc himself is everywhere: doing battle, directing the other Caciques, spreading the spirit of victory. CAMERA MOVES IN ON him: Handsome, confident, full of fury; this man is a leader.

DIAZ (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Watching Cuauhtemoc, we were overcome by a sense of familiarity: he was Moctezuma's blood. He resembled Moctezuma. It was as if Moctezuma himself, Moctezuma the warrior, had finally come forth to fight us: in the form of Cuauhtemoc.

Hold on Cuauhtemoc as this idea, this eerie resemblance, strikes our emotions. Then the noise of gunfire distracts us:

Two Spaniards fire their guns, sinking canoes, and leap into the lake. They hold their weapons and gunpowder above water -

This posture makes swimming difficult and defense impossible. They are forced to drop their rifles and fight for their lives.

Up ahead: another Spaniard climbs out of the lake and tries to fire his gun: click. With wet gunpowder, the weapon is useless.

The Indian that The Spaniard fired at...captures him.

And Young Bernal Diaz is fighting frantically, hopelessly, for his life. He looks like a boy trying to do a man's work.

DIAZ (V.O.) (CONT'D)

For the second time, I knew I would die. We all knew it. I was hardly wrong.

Young Diaz miraculously escapes, for the moment, from three Indians.

A few feet away, the giant Tzilacatzin pulls back his slingshot, and knocks a Spaniard off his horse.

Two Spaniards fire crossbows at him -

Hit him!

He laughs, pulls the arrows out of his cloth armor, and digs for another stone.

Though there is panic among the Spaniards, the chief hidalgos - Cortes, Sandoval, etc. - are keeping their composure.

Some Spaniards seem sluggish. When they run, it looks like slow-motion. When they hit the water, they sink. Either way they die.

DIAZ (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Those who had loaded themselves with gold this night fulfilled a life-long dream: they died rich.

We see Villafana. Sneaky eyes.

DIAZ (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 And even in such extremity, petty
 plots unfolded.

Villafana is guarding Marina. But...is it possible?...he seems to be, very subtly, guiding her away from safety:

As we see this, Villafana's Cohort grabs Cortes' arm and yells something. Points at Marina.

Cortes sees her. Her swollen belly. Swollen with his child. Without hesitation, he hurtles toward her, into the heart of the Indian army. We realize: this is his virtue doing him in!

In this moment, through the insane intensity of his rage, we see clearly how much Cortes loves his Indian mistress.

And she knows it. Sees it. Though her features, as always, seem impassive, it touches her to see Cortes' passion made manifest.

As Cortes frees her, they exchange a look. An acknowledgement.

Then Villafana himself, watching Cortes, is seized from the rear and dragged toward the water.

VILLAFANA
 My Captain! Cortes!

Cortes sees him, jumps from his horse...

And is immediately surrounded by Indians.

Villafana scurries free as all the Mexicans concentrate on Cortes:

They grab his limbs, knock his sword to the ground -

He yells, writhes, punches, but they're dragging him toward the water -

Tzilacatzin grabs him.

Holds him aloft and laughs. Is everything lost?

No. Cristobal De Olid is tearing toward Cortes. Like a tractor steaming through heavy grass, he cuts a swath through the enemy.

DIAZ (V.O.)
 Whatever you say of Cristobal de
 Olid, in battle he was a veritable
 Hector. It is strange, but I swear
 I never saw another man fight with
 such bravery.

The sight of Cristobal - and certain death - forces Tzilacatzin to drop Cortes -

Cristobal throws Cortes a sword. Cortes fights as:

Cristobal and Tzilacatzin begin a private battle of wills...

Sandoval is also moving toward Cortes, bringing an extra horse. An Aztec jabs at Cortes' head. Blood bursts forth... Sandoval arrives, and Cortes lurches up onto the extra horse - Villafana, watching from safety, curses in disgust.

As Cortes mounts the horse, he sees: His Page being carried off in a canoe. The Page's eyes fixed on his master.

CORTES
My page!

Sandoval prevents Cortes from plunging his horse into the water.

Enraged, Cortes tears his eyes off his Page and spurs his horse into a swarm of Indians, cutting them down with savage intensity. He and Sandoval are among the last Spaniards on this section of the dike. They pass Velasquez de Leon and Alvarado, bravely keeping the rear, and drive their horses into the water.

Ahead of them: Marina and Two Spaniards have commandeered a canoe and - accompanied by Dona Ana - are gliding to safety.

Suddenly drums.

And fire in the distance.

From the main temple. Spaniards being led up the side. With horror we recognize: Cervantes in the lead.

For a moment the battle ceases and everyone on both sides watches - in horror or triumph - as the familiar ritual is enacted:

Cervantes is thrown onto the sacrificial stone.

Held down.

His chest is cut open.

His heart is held aloft for all to see.

His body is thrown callously down the side of the pyramid.

The Spaniards turn from the sight in shock and redouble their efforts at escape. Now, more than ever, they are motivated by fear.

But scarcely have the Spanish begun anew, scarcely have Cortes and Sandoval reach the next segment of causeway, when a new sound comes: a pure piercing note...

The Indians raise their arms in triumph; the Spanish turn and see:

Cauhtemoc, blowing his conch shell: A tremulous "e" sharp.

The Indians renew their attack with a fury close to insanity. Cuauhtemoc's "horn" is apparently a mandate to kill, capture, or die in the attempt.

As Cortes and Sandoval try to ward off the homicidal rage, we swing back to:

Alvarado and Velasquez de Leon, protecting the rear as the last Spaniards enter the water. The two men fight side by side, with vastly different styles - Velasquez precise and aristocratic, Alvarado a fountain of almost homicidal fury - yet we sense between them teamwork, comradeship, and, at last, mutual respect.

Seeing everyone else has gone:

VELASQUEZ DE LEON
After you.

ALVARADO
Get in the water, you fool!

VELASQUEZ DE LEON
(grins)
Together then.
(glances at Alvarado)
At my signal?

The glance, the camaraderie, costs him.

As his eyes are averted, a stone hits him on the forehead.

Tzilacatzin raises his arms in triumph -

Velasquez de Leon falls. Alvarado leans over him -

VELASQUEZ DE LEON (CONT'D)
Save yourself!

They're beset by Indians.

But Alvarado fights the Aztecs off with one arm as he hoists Velasquez de Leon onto his back.

Tzilacatzin keeps firing stones which Alvarado somehow deflects with his sword.

For a few moments, like some mythological warrior, Alvarado holds twenty men at bay with one arm.

But his load is too heavy. He can't continue the swirling motions which protect his wounded comrade.

As Alvarado's movements slow, an Indian leaps from behind and, aiming for Alvarado, hits Velasquez de Leon on the back of the head.

Velasquez de Leon's legs stiffen... shudder...and relax.

Alvarado roars with rage.

He drops Velasquez de Leon's body and goes on the attack.

Again he drives the enemy back, but how long can he keep this up?

The water which separates him from the next section of causeway is filled with canoes. Impossible to swim it.

He turns on his attackers, stabbing one, tossing two into the water... But, totally isolated, his position appears hopeless.

He sees something. For no reason we can perceive, he launches a diagonal attack, moving away from the water...

They we see: A lance lying on the ground.

He fights his way to it, picks it up.

Too long. Indians too close to him. The lance is useless.

He utters a blood-chilling roar; and the Indians fall back for an instant. He points the lance toward the water and runs...

His speed building, building...

Indians swiping at him as he sprints past...

He reaches the water and aims the lance downward, into the waves -

Like some maritime pole-vaulter, he catapults himself...

out over the water...

over the heads of amazed Indians in canoes...

shouting with the glory of his escape...

And landing near the next section of causeway. Indians are all around him, but they're so amazed that they retreat. He gains land.

DIAZ (V.O.)

To the Aztecs who called Alvarado the sun, in respect for his blazing red hair, this was the most amazing feat in all our time in New Spain. You can still find the spot, in the city of Mexico, where Alvarado made his famous leap.

The scene which greets Alvarado on the next dike is terrifying. He's literally walking on the corpses of his comrades, many of whose bodies are being sacked for gold. Other Spaniards are still fighting, struggling toward the last gap in the bridge.

When he himself reaches the gap, it too is filled with floating Spanish bodies, Indian bodies...

He slogs across this bridge of collapses, dodging stones and arrows...

And reaches the last section of causeway, which connects to land. 200 yards ahead, a small band of Spaniards is fighting bravely.

Surrounding Indians pay Alvarado the courtesy of a few idle sword thrusts, but they're primarily occupied in looting.

He sprints forward and joins the rest of the group: only a few hundred men. They burst through the last resistance and stagger to land. Stunned, dazed, exhausted.

In a broad field, Cortes collapses under a sycamore tree.

He stares blankly. Blood streams down his face.

Dawn coming...

Sandoval approaches wearily; the boy becoming a man. (NOTE: from this moment forward, Sandoval no longer stutters.)

SANDOVAL

The doctor must tend to your head.

CORTES

(ignoring this)

What is your reckoning?

SANDOVAL

We have lost most of our Indian allies and two-thirds of our own men.

CORTES

Tell me. All of them.

SANDOVAL

Too many to tell.

Cortes glares, and Sandoval starts reciting the dead.

SANDOVAL (CONT'D)

Juan Velasquez de Leon. Francisco de Salcedo. Francisco de Morla. Lares the Good rider. Cervantes the buffoon. Ponce the card-player -

Cortes lowers his head. Weeping?

SANDOVAL (CONT'D)

Enough?

CORTES

(shaking his head)

Marina?

SANDOVAL

Safe.

Cortes nods.

CORTES
And Lopez?

SANDOVAL
Which one?

CORTES
Martin Lopez, the map-maker and
shipbuilder!

SANDOVAL
Should I find out?

Cortes nods.

As Sandoval starts to leave -

CORTES
They have my page.
(Sandoval stops)
They will sacrifice my page.

SANDOVAL
(nods; long beat)
One of many.

He leaves. Cortes is weeping unabashed, tears streaming down. We are moved by this startling image...until we draw back and see:

In the branches over Cortes' head sits a Golden Eagle.

CUT TO:

EXT. MAKESHIFT SPANISH CAMP. THE NEXT DAY.

Father Olmeda giving last rites to a dying soldier...

The field is an outdoor hospital. Men lie groaning, others tend to wounds, cauterizing and wrapping them. Everyone moves with pathetic slowness, as if they were all octogenarians.

Young Bernal Diaz rides into camp, comes up to Cortes. Sandoval also approaches to get the news:

CORTES
Well?

YOUNG DIAZ
They are making sacrifices to their
Gods.

They all know what this means.

CORTES
We must thank the true God they do
not attack again. They would meet
little resistance.

Sandoval opens a small leather box. Cortes (eyes wide, face glazed with fever) looks on.

SANDOVAL
From The Astrologer.

CORTES
Botello? He is...?

Sandoval shakes his head, and inspects Botello's papers, which are covered with odd markings:

SANDOVAL
Even this little dwarf had his
loyalty.
"How can I survive here?"
Do nothing.
"How can the army survive?"
Leave tomorrow night.
"Then if we leave that night, I
will die?"
Yes.

Long beat. Cristobal is approaching them -

CORTES
If our man could read the future,
what did Moctezuma know?
What does Cuauhtemoc know now?
Is the issue already decided?

CRISTOBAL OLID
(interrupting)
What are we doing? Must we sit here
till the Heathens feed us to their -

CORTES
No. "A wounded hare does not nap."
We leave at -

He stops. Stares:

A familiar blond beard. Cervantes is approaching -
Other Spaniards also staring. How can this be?

SANDOVAL
Cervantes! We thought you were -

He stops. He sees, as we do:

"Cervantes" has two right hands.

And two left hands.

It is not Cervantes at all. It is an Aztec wearing Cervantes' flayed skin!

"Cervantes" laughs at their expressions.

They run at him.

Stab him.

He laughs until he dies.

CUT TO:

EXT. CAMP NIGHT.

Pitiful sight: the severely wounded and the lame, and the few remaining women, huddle in the middle. Those who cannot walk sit on, or are tied to, horses.

Decrepit foot soldiers surround this nucleus.

A dozen hale riders and horses circumnavigate the whole.

Campfires are left burning.

DIAZ (V.O.)
We departed at midnight, leaving
our fires burning to fool the
enemy.

As they begin their march, a SOLDIER tied to a horse has a seizure. He shakes terribly, keeps shaking, but no one goes to his aid.

In fact, no one notices. He's not much worse off than anyone else.

DIAZ (V.O.) (CONT'D)
In our adversity, we were sustained
by the knowledge that the greatest
disaster had already befallen us
and we had survived.
But we were wrong.
The greatest disaster lay ahead.

CUT TO:

EXT. TLASCALA. DAY.

Foreground blur: Spanish and Tlascalan Armies re-entering the city.

DIAZ (V.O.)
We returned to Tlascala.

Rear of the frame, very clear: weeping Tlascalan women scan the returning army for husbands, fathers, brothers, sons... A timeless scene.

CUT TO:

INT. TENT. DAY.

Cortes lies delirious...

DIAZ (V.O.)
 Within a day, we thought our
 commander would die.

A "surgeon" removes part of a bone from Cortes' bloody skull.

CORTES
 The ships! Ready the ships!

Marina looks up at Sandoval:

MARINA
 For hours, the same: "the ships."

SANDOVAL
 Cuba?
 (bitterly)
 The men will be relieved.

Xicotencatl the Elder is led into the tent, to Cortes' side.

He takes Cortes' limp hand and holds it.

Frowns...cocks his head as though listening to something...

And speaks.

Marina responds, and the old man mutters something.

MARINA
 He says it will be worse when
 Cortes recovers.

SANDOVAL
What will be worse?

MARINA
 The slaughter will be completed.

SANDOVAL
 Of which side?

She asks the old man.

He spreads his arms wide: he does not know.

CUT TO:

INT. TENT. SAME NIGHT.

Vigil. Sandoval watches Marina apply compresses to Cortes' head.

We sense: only the care of these two people is keeping Cortes alive.
 Softly, after a long beat:

MARINA
 This..."love"...is it something you
 have, or something you long for?

SANDOVAL
You have it, I long for it.

On Marina's hand, holding Cortes' hand:

CUT TO:

INT. TENT. DAY.

Cortes, voice weak and eyes over-bright, sits facing Cristobal.

CORTES
 Where goes the ox that it does not
 draw the plow? We are soldiers! On
 to victory:

CRISTOBAL OLID
 Two days ago you kissed death, now -

CORTES
 Martin Lopez will build our ships -

CRISTOBAL OLID
 And sail to Cuba! They beat us!
 Savagely! Decisively!

CORTES
 Yes. They showed us how to win...

CRISTOBAL OLID
 (darkly, a threat)
 I swear: If you pursue this course
 when your brain is clear...

He storms out. Cortes calls cheerfully, his fever raging:

CORTES
 Sound the trumpets! Pour the
 brandy! In two months I will be Don
 Hernando, Governor of Mexico!

CUT TO:

EXT. TLASCALAN STREET. DAY.

Bernal Diaz at 19 is tending a tiny grove of orange trees a foot tall. Weeding, replanting, etc.

DIAZ (V.O.)
 Some say we brought nothing but
 death and disease to this New
 World. It was not so. The orange
 pips I planted came up well, and
 grew well, and to this day all the
 oranges growing in New Spain
 descend from my trees...

(beat)

(MORE)

DIAZ (CONT'D)
 I do not pretend that these fruits,
 sweet though they be, are worth the
 life of a single Christian.

Cortes, head bandaged, walks slowly past Diaz. An old man's gait.

DIAZ (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 As Cortes recovered, he held to his
 plan.

Walking with Cortes is Martin Lopez. We overhear them discussing the
 design of the brigantines...

They reach agreement and Martin Lopez goes off, walking past:

Villafana and his Cohort lurking beside a building, preparing to
 attack Cortes -

DIAZ (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Not everyone was pleased.

Cortes seems weak, helpless, unable to defend himself -

But just at the moment when the traitors are about to attack:

Marina rushes up to Cortes holding a small infant:

MARINA
 Hernando! He smiled!

Cortes nods.

MARINA (CONT'D)
 Look, he's doing it again! To you!

Cortes gives the child an idle pat. They turn a corner and see Dona
 Ana, Moctezuma's daughter, nursing a second infant...

Cortes looks at the two women, two babies...

CORTES
 My wife was barren; now I have two
 children. If I allowed myself to
 feel these things, I would be
 happy.

MARINA
 You do feel them.

CORTES
 No.

MARINA
 I see it.

He glares at her silently, then looks again toward Dona Ana:

CORTES
 That child is descended from both
 me and Moctezuma...

Another silence as Cortes stares at Dona Ana's daughter...

Quite impulsively, Marina hands Cortes her child.

To her surprise, he accepts it.

The infant seizes his father's pinkie, and suddenly, unexpectedly, Cortes is overwhelmed by feelings of tenderness...

Marina sees it. For a moment her face is unguarded, filled with love and something else: longing?

MARINA

They say...that you will do
anything to get what you want.

A strange statement in this moment; what exactly is she asking?

CORTES

Of course.

And what is he answering?

An odd silence. He hands the child back.

CORTES (CONT'D)

I am sorry.

Is he apologizing for being who he is?

MARINA

I am not.

He looks at the child: suddenly distant from him...

CORTES

If I feel this child, I will feel
other things. Things which may
cause me to avert my eyes in the
face of danger or suffering. If I
do that, even for an instant, we
will all die in Mexico.

MARINA

(casual)
Then feel nothing.
(fiercely)
But love him with your secret
heart.

She turns from him in anger and walks away.

CUT TO:

EXT. TLASCALAN SQUARE. DAY.

SLOW PAN of the square: A kind of picnic. Spaniards lounging around, some dressed in Indian garb, all eating Indian food with great relish. They are becoming assimilated.

DIAZ (V.O.)
We stayed in Tlascala six months.

We see a carpentry shop: several boats under construction.

DIAZ (V.O.) (CONT'D)
We built ships we hoped would
blockade Tenochtitlan, and sent out
small expeditions which conquered
the Aztecs' allies.

The major hidalgos are being pampered by their harems...

DIAZ (V.O.) (CONT'D)
We also grew used to Indian ways.

As we complete the PAN of the square, we find Cortes, fully
recovered, speaking to his men. We don't yet hear his voice.

DIAZ (V.O.) (CONT'D)
But pleasure is married to
cowardice. We faced a final mutiny
in our own midst.

CORTES
(sound fading up:)
...to those of you who still doubt.
You told us we could never survive
our battles here in Tlascala, and
you were right.
You said we could not safely enter
Tenochtitlan, and then leave
Tenochtitlan; again you were right.
You say now it is suicide to
proceed; I cannot argue.
By the laws of logic, you have
always been right.
Yet we have survived.
I ask you to trust me, and follow
me, one last time...
(long beat)
If you cannot, say it now.

Cortes looks over the crowd:

At Cristobal...

At Villafana...

Neither man speaks.

Cortes nods.

CORTES (CONT'D)
Then let us complete our miracle.

The crowd cheers.

Cortes glances at Sandoval, and stalks toward his tent.

CUT TO:

INT. CORTES' TENT. DAY.

Cortes looks at Sandoval and shakes his head.

CORTES
Their plan is set in stone.

Sandoval nods.

CORTES (CONT'D)
Any details?

SANDOVAL
A package will come, supposedly
from Spain. As you open it, they
will kill us.

CORTES
When?

SANDOVAL
One hour.

CORTES
Is Alvarado with them?

SANDOVAL
He loves battle too much to desert.

CORTES
Cristobal?

Beat.

SANDOVAL
I don't know.

On Cortes' face:

CUT TO:

EXT. CORTES' TENT.

Cortes, Sandoval, and Alvarado waiting.

Sandoval's eyes move, see: a MESSENGER approaching with a package.
Sandoval grunts. They all rise.

As they start to walk, the Messenger intercepts them:

MESSENGER
Captain! A package has come from
Spain.

CORTES
 Deliver it to my tent.

MESSENGER
 But sire -

CORTES
 Are you deaf? I will open it after
 my walk.

He strolls through camp, keeping a wary eye...

Some men call a greeting, others appear guilty.

Villafana stands in front of his tent pretending not to look at them.
 He stretches and goes inside.

CORTES (CONT'D)
 I would die for any of them.

SANDOVAL
 That is why they hate you.

They wander toward Villafana's tent.

CORTES
 Then what? Am I to be less than
 myself?

He slashes a hole in Villafana's tent and jumps:

INSIDE

Villafana and his Cohort conferring -

They blink, stunned -

Villafana grabs something from inside his shirt. Parchment. Starts to
 swallow it -

Cortes snatches it as Alvarado and Sandoval seize the conspirators.
 Cortes stares at the parchment.

Turns his back on the others.

We, who see his face, know he has read something deeply disturbing.

SANDOVAL
 The names?

Cortes nods. Responds to the implied question:

CORTES
 No one of stature.
 Let's hope the sight of these two
 scares the others into submission.
 (turns to Villafana)
 Have you anything to say before you
 die?

VILLAFANA

I curse the day I met you.
I curse the day I heard your name.
I am put on this sweet earth one
time, and I curse the God who makes
me die because of your mad dreams.

CORTES

I am only mad if we lose. Had you
followed me back to -

VILLAFANA

Had I followed, I would still have
died, but I am glad to have taken
this course. I had the courage to
stand up to Hernan Cortes.

Cortes stares at him.

Villafana stares defiantly back.

Cortes nods, and Alvarado gags Villafana.

CORTES

(tearing up the list)
My friends: we need every man. This
paper did not exist.

CUT TO:

EXT. SPANISH CAMP. DAY.

Great commotion. The army looks on as Sandoval and Alvarado prepare
to hang Villafana and his Cohort.

Cortes watches from a distance.

We realize: he's not watching the hanging at all; he's watching
another tent.

Cristobal stands in the entrance to that tent.

Cortes approaches...

CORTES

A sad thing.

Cristobal practically jumps.

Looks toward Villafana and Cohort...

CRISTOBAL OLID

What did they do?

CORTES

Mutiny. They claimed they had 50
men, but wouldn't give names.

CRISTOBAL OLID
If they had?

CORTES
I would hang 50.
That's why I am speaking with you.

This makes Cristobal nervous.

Cortes pauses, proceeds:

CORTES (CONT'D)
You have often expressed an
eagerness to return home -

CRISTOBAL OLID
But I would never -

CORTES
Still, others may come to you.
Others may seek your -

CRISTOBAL OLID
If they do, I'll tell them no.

CORTES
If they do...kill them.

Cristobal nods soberly...

CORTES (CONT'D)
As my best soldier, you are the
only man I would trust to execute
this sentence.

Cristobal stares at Cortes...

CRISTOBAL OLID
I wish...
to God...
I did not love you.

This is too much. Cortes spins away, to keep Cristobal from seeing his tortured face.

He glances toward the gallows: the hanging is imminent.

He sighs. Swallows.

CORTES
Shall we watch?

They walk toward the gallows. In the distance the bodies fall and shudder spasmodically.

CUT TO:

EXT. TLASCALA. DAY.

Gorgeous day. Cortes reviewing his troops: healthy, eager, well-equipped. Our attention goes to splendor and spectacle: the size of the force, their Indian shields, etc. Background information:

DIAZ (V.O.)

While we rested in Tlascala, our forces increased. We seized two ships sent by Velasquez, and two from Jamaica. Everyone joined our army.

Line after line, row after row; this army has size...

DIAZ (V.O.) (CONT'D)

There was also a ship from Spain bearing an Emissary of the Crown.

Reveal from the rear: the ROYAL EMISSARY: beautiful robes and a bald spot. His head appears to be buried in a woman's chest.

DIAZ (V.O.) (CONT'D)

He was a syphilitic old man who would not eat anything except breast milk from a woman from Castile.

We now see very plainly: the old geezer is nursing. His face contented, his jaw pumping away like a newborn...

DIAZ (V.O.) (CONT'D)

We thought he perfectly represented the bureaucracy.

Cortes reaches the front of the Spanish forces.

DIAZ (V.O.) (CONT'D)

We had 900 Spaniards, twice our original force.

Farther down the hill: an endless horde of Indians.

DIAZ (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Through conquest, we had gained 200,000 Indian allies. The Aztecs had no more.

Cortes signals, and the army begins to march. A grand spectacle...

DIAZ (V.O.) (CONT'D)

If this were merely a story, it would end here, and our victory would seem assured. But this is truth.

(MORE)

DIAZ (CONT'D)
 In a few short months, our allies
 would desert us, our numbers would
 dwindle to less than 700, and we
 would contemplate our doom.

CUT TO:

EXT. HIGH MOUNTAIN TRAIL. DAY.

The army continuing its march with the same confidence and style. As they crest a hill, we MOVE to the front, where we see Cortes and the other Hidalgos looking down on the city of Tenochtitlan.

The city is white.

The lakes are white.

Everything that lies before us: white. Shimmering in the wind...

Like snow, or flowers. A magical image.

The Hidalgos exchange a look: what is it?

A conch-shell trumpet blows, and the whole valley moves:

White cloaks are lowered, and we realize: this is the Mexican army, spread out over the valley, the causeways, the waters.

In contrast to the Aztecs, the Spaniards look unspeakably literal. Like an army of solid men about to do battle with spirits...

Cortes gestures and ever-so-slowly his forces begin to descend.

CUT TO:

EXT. CORTES' CAMP. NIGHT.

The army encamped. The lake is mysterious, covered with wisps of fog...

Cortes stares out; Marina, Cristobal, and Sandoval at his side.

CRISTOBAL
 The assault is impossible.

Cortes nods. All the men's faces tell us they are now several months into the battle.

CRISTOBAL (CONT'D)
 We cut off their fresh water; they
 fight on.

One of the brigantines Martin Lopes was building slips into the lake. Cortes hardly seems to notice.

CRISTOBAL (CONT'D)
 Our ships control their lakes,
 disrupted their food supplies; they
 fight on.

Cortes and Marina are peering across the waters at the magical city of Tenochtitlan, its towers glowing in the moonlight.

CRISTOBAL (CONT'D)

Day after day, our soldiers break into their city and kill them by the hundreds, thousands, ten thousands; they fight with undiminished rage.

CORTES

(nods sadly)
We will not win this war by defeating their army.

Beat.

SANDOVAL

Then how...?

CORTES

(softly, staring at the city)
It is so beautiful.

CUT TO:

EXT. TENOCHTITLAN. STREETS. DAY.

Smoking beams and cinders. Guttred houses: charcoal. We sweep down the street, houses with flames still flickering. Sound up: Screaming Spaniards. Spaniards with torches setting every house ablaze. Fire as hell. Fire as fury, revenge, all the Spanish frustration coming out with sadistic glee...

FLYING CAMERA, chaotic images; swirling flashes of blood, wood, smoke. Out of control in some horrible/satisfying way. RACK FOCUS through the flames out onto:

THE LAKE. DAY.

Houses on stilts, blazing all across the water. Alvarado run out of a burning house, carrying booty.

His brig sails to the next building. Passing the floating gardens, once blooming and beautiful, now dry as dust.

Roof of a nearby house: two Aztec women and a very old man look on, fear and confusion on their faces.

DIAZ (V.O.)

To the Aztecs, war was a ritual activity, a religious rite whose object was to obtain captives for sacrifice. They did not understand why we burned their houses. To them it was stupid and mean; it showed we were heathens, devils of destruction whose purposes were beyond understanding.

Alvarado and his men jump off the brig and climb the steps of the adjacent dwelling. Guns drawn, they enter:

INT. AZTEC HOUSE. DAY.

Two gaunt women and three children curl in a corner, terrified. Their bodies are emaciated.

While his men search for valuables, Alvarado tries to shoo the occupants out the door.

ALVARADO
Move, you idiots! Go! Now! Get out!

He stares at them in disgust.

ALVARADO (CONT'D)
Light it up, they'll go.

His men torch the far corner.

OUTSIDE HOUSE

Alvarado and his men run down the steps, watching the fire build.

A ramshackle canoe waits at the bottom of the steps.

The corner of the house which was torched is now blazing.

Those inside will have to leave soon.

They do not.

Within moments, the entire house is ablaze.

There was never any movement to escape.

CUT TO:

INT. CORTES' TENT. NIGHT.

He and Marina are eating their dinner. Just like a married couple. Only Cortes has no appetite.

Finally he puts down his fork.

Looks at her.

She stares back. Completely accepting, waiting...

MARINA
Tell me.

CORTES
It was my greatest hope to preserve
this city for the world to marvel.
(beat)
(MORE)

CORTES (CONT'D)
 Who am I? What right do I have to
 make such decisions?

MARINA
 If you don't make them, no one
 will. If you don't make them, we
 will all die.

CORTES
 Perhaps that would be better.

He stares at her a long time...

CORTES (CONT'D)
 In all of this, you are the one
 thing which has no bitterness.

The tenderest look between them...

CUT TO:

EXT. CAUSEWAY. DAY.

Cortes, eyes gleaming, exhorts his men across a break in the
 causeway. We sense for the first time: incipient triumph.

DIAZ (V.O.)
 The next day our army, fighting on
 three separate causeways, pressed
 to the heart of the city.

Crossing the channel, the Spaniards rage on, Cortes in the lead.

DIAZ (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Once across the channels, we did
 not fill them in. We smelled
 victory, and gave no thought to
 retreat.

EXT. TENOCHTITLAN. STREETS. DAY.

On Cortes' face, as he rides. In his excitement, we sense his ego,
 his drive: something intensely charismatic and very ugly.

Around Cortes, we feel his army: other horsemen at his side, footmen
 running behind... Aztecs screaming, retreating...

We stay on his face. The triumph of the will. The masculine, almost
 sexual thrill of conquering...

And then he turns a corner and his features change.

Suddenly blank.

Staring at:

Impaled on stakes: heads of previously captured Spaniards -

The giant Tzilacatzin, laughing -

Mocking whistles from all directions -

Cortes and the other soldiers, disoriented -

"E" sharp. On a rooftop: Cuauhtemoc blows his bugle -

Aztecs manifest, everywhere. Instantaneous assault -

Spaniards overwhelmed, pulled from their horses -

Total chaos -

The Indians surging forward like a huge wave, breaking over the Spaniards -

For an instant all we can see are the cloaks of the Aztecs. Is it over? So quickly?

Cortes surfaces. Then two more Spaniards. Twenty yards away, we also spot: Alvarado -

But fighting is almost impossible. The enemy is too thick. One Spaniard after another is dragged away -

Cortes bleeding, fighting, three Indians on his back shouting "Malinche! Malinche!" -

Alvarado makes his way to Cortes' side. The two seem alone now, no other Spaniards in sight; both men wounded, bleeding profusely -

ALVARADO

I ask forgiveness for all the blunderheaded things I have done.

CORTES

Nonsense.

ALVARADO

It is all a man could want, in this life, to have fought here with you.

CORTES

No.

ALVARADO

No what?

CORTES

Your words are sweet but ill-timed. This is not the end.

ALVARADO

(grins with admiration)
Then let's get out of here!

Cortes leaps onto the back of an Indian, quickly looks around, and ducks as another Indian flies over his head, trying to grab him. Comes down again and points:

CORTES
The horses.

Now that the two men have a purpose, they fight with redoubled energies. Indians are draped over their backs, hacking away at them, drawing blood...but the men continue toward the horses, which are too penned in to move out of the way.

FROM A DISTANCE we see them gain their horses and ride away, gradually making their way back to the break in the causeway, where a few Spaniards are still fighting. But the causeway was not filled in, and the Spaniards are trapped. The water is filled with canoes. Spaniards are being seized, pulled into boats, carried away -

DIAZ (V.O.)
This was the victory the Aztec Gods
had promised.
This was the disaster we had feared
for two interminable years.

As the massacre continues, we:

CUT TO:

EXT. LAKESIDE. SANDOVAL'S CAMP. LATE AFTERNOON.

Post battle. Wounded men all over.

Sandoval peers into the distance...

An Indian Translator at his side says:

TRANSLATOR
They say they have won victories on
all three causeways.

Out in a canoe, Indians hold up three Spanish heads. Impossible, from this distance, to discern their features.

TRANSLATOR (CONT'D)
These are the heads of Cortes,
Alvarado, Cristobal.

Sandoval nods slowly.

SANDOVAL
So it would seem.
(calls)
Page! Page! Bring my horse!

His page comes running with the large chestnut -

CUT TO:

EXT. MEXICAN TERRITORY. DUSK.

Sandoval riding low and fast, without armor...

Mexicans trying to hit him with arrows, stones; he's too fast.

From his intense expression, we realize: his mission is personal.

CUT TO:

EXT. CORTES' CAMP. DUSK.

Sandoval rides in.

Dismounts and enters:

CORTES' TENT

Cortes weak and disheartened. Leg bandaged, both arms, his chest...
For the first time, we see age on his face... It's as if this last
escape has sapped him of his strength and spirit.

SANDOVAL

They said you were dead.

Cortes nods as if it were true.

CORTES

My sins are the cause of this. I
pressed too hard, too fast, we did
not fill the channel -

SANDOVAL

Still. We have survived this day
too.

CORTES

Why?

Sandoval looks at him in consternation and shock.

CORTES (CONT'D)

Why have we survived?

MARINA

His spirits are low.

CORTES

I'm being honest!
(bitter)
I told them to fill the channel,
but they "forgot!"

For the first time, he is blaming someone else.

SANDOVAL

Then...was it your fault or theirs?

CORTES

(pauses)
Mine. All mine.
And now...have you heard about our
Indian allies?
(off Sandoval's look)
They desert us in the morning.

SANDOVAL

Why?

CORTES

(shrugs)

Ask them.

A terrible banging of drums. The great huehetl atop the pyramid.

Cortes and Sandoval exchange a glance.

Louder drums. Regular beating.

In apprehension, they leave the tent.

EXT. TENT. NIGHT.

They come out, look into the distance.

A few miles away, so close you can almost touch it with your hand:

A parade marching up the side of the main cue:

Brightly lit by torches. In the center: 30 naked SPANIARDS.

CORTES

Am I next? Or you?

Not said with fear or fatalism; almost with relief.

SANDOVAL

You cannot say such things!
If you despair, we will all -

CORTES

We have what, 700 wounded men?
Moctezuma was right: there is a
destiny, and we will meet ours
whether I despair or not.

He stares at the temple.

The train has reached the top; something strange is happening.
Feathers are put on the heads of the Spanish captives.

They are naked, forced to dance grotesquely, with fans... It's like
some bizarre homosexual game...only this one ends in death...

SANDOVAL

I can't watch.

CORTES

(with disdain)

Then avert your eyes.

The first Spaniard is tied to the sacrificial stone. His mouth
contorted in screams; we hear nothing.

In camp: Other soldiers watch, trying to swallow their fear.

On the pyramid: the first Spaniard's heart is held aloft...

Canoes glide past the camp and Aztecs shout tauntingly...

Marina reacts, glances anxiously at Cortes, then at the ground.
Finally, quietly:

MARINA

This is what scares our Indian
allies.

(hesitates; she is worried)

They say... Their Gods proclaim we
will all die within eight days.

Cortes stares at her.

Blinks.

Looks at the canoes.

Back at Marina.

At Sandoval.

A touch of fire returning to his eyes. Mixed with irony: it is not
until he gives up that he wins. When he speaks, it is to himself:

CORTES

The war is over.

SANDOVAL

Never say it! If I have learned one
thing from you -

CORTES

(quietly)

For eight days we must keep to our
camps. Simply maintain the
blockade.

Sandoval is pleased to glimpse the return, however muted, of Cortes
the leader.

SANDOVAL

And then?

CORTES

We'll still be here.
Their prophecy, their law, will be
proved false.
Their bodies will be weak from
hunger, thirst.
They will peer into the abyss and
contemplate their own defeat.

SANDOVAL

No attacks?

CORTES

No. Wars are won in the mind, not
in the field.

SANDOVAL

And for we few who have strength?

CORTES

If you have energy to burn...use
it.

CUT TO:

INT. AVIARY. DAY.

No people. Birds moving around, chirping.

We notice the thick lattice of sticks which keep them in.

Slowly, with a kind of horror, we realize what we're about to see.

Glow of a flame nearby, off-screen.

Gradually it MOVES INTO FRAME. Torch.

Birds begin to flutter nervously, twittering in discordant song.

The torch moves down, out of frame again. Lights the lattice.

A YOUNG SOLDIER doing it. Stands back to watch. No guilt.

Birds start to scream -

Flames catching fast, spreading...

Birds whirling frantically, beaks distorted -

Some fly directly into the flame and incinerate.

Others crash into each other and plunge into the fire -

The humming/flapping sound of many wings...

As the blaze spreads, a piece of the latticework crashes down...

Making a hole in the ceiling through which a few birds fly free.

At the top, the GOLDEN EAGLE caws loudly.

Flames spiral upward, toward it -

The Golden Eagle squeezes through a hole in the latticework. Was the
hole always there? Could the bird have left at any time?

It soars into the sky, squawking its protest.

Below it, the other birds have become flying incinerators, setting
their fellows ablaze.

We watch helplessly. The destruction of civilization. The senseless incineration of something unspeakably beautiful...

CUT TO:

EXT. LAKE SHORE. NIGHT.

Cortes, much recovered, watches as his soldiers slaughter Aztecs of all sexes in the b.g. The enemy still has the will, but not the strength, to fight back. Far in the distance, the whole city burns.

CORTES

(in genuine anguish)

Why do they fight on? We begged them to surrender, were refused, and we killed ten thousand in a day. We begged again, refused again, and our allies killed forty thousand. How many warriors can they have left?

CRISTOBAL

A few hundred.

CORTES

So why don't they surrender?

Cristobal shrugs.

Beat.

MARINA

I know why.

(beat)

I heard them say.

(beat)

They think...that you are cowards.

Silence. Bewilderment as Cortes tries, without success, to process this thought. Marina continues:

MARINA (CONT'D)

To them, war is hand-to-hand combat, designed to reveal the will of the Gods.

They think it is cowardly to kill from a distance, with guns and crossbows, cowardly to retreat if you are losing a battle, cowardly and immoral to win a war by starving the enemy.

CORTES

And this is why -

MARINA

Would you concede to cowards, to heathens who gain victory by vicious and unfair means?

Cortes looks again at the slaughter of Aztecs only a hundred yards away. He sees it now, if only for an instant, in a different way.

CUT TO:

EXT. MOCTEZUMA'S PALACE. DAY.

Cortes leads his army into the deserted main square.

Stops his horse, looks around. Sensing something...something odd.

The square feels spooky. Magical.. Haunted...

Cortes feels it...and ignores it. Spurs his horse on.

CUT TO:

INT. MOCTEZUMA'S PALACE. ROOFTOP. DAY.

Cortes peering through his telescope, into the distance:

Only one small sector of the city remains standing.

Father Olmeda is at Cortes' side.

Silence.

CORTES

No one will believe I love the Aztec. There is no courage, anywhere in the world, that will compare.

FATHER OLMEDA

That is easy to say, since you have won.

CORTES

What do you say, Father?

FATHER OLMEDA

What you accomplished here defies human understanding. Countless times we were doomed, yet here we stand. As strong as you are, as full of guile and courage, you would never have achieved this had it not been the will of God. He willed it, so it is. You were merely his instrument.

Beat.

CORTES

Praise be His Name.

FATHER OLMEDA

God's name? ...or yours?

Cortes flashes him an angry look.

Then lifts his spyglass and looks out over the water, where a brigantine is chasing three pirogues.

DIAZ (V.O.)
After a 93 day siege, the war
ended.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAKE. DAY.

Sandoval in the brigantine, chasing the swift and brightly colored pirogues.

As the brigantine draws close, Sandoval fires a shot in the air.

Two beats. Then Cuauhtemoc, in the center canoe, stands.

Long stunned silence. Just this one man standing, and the knowledge in all who witness of what it means...

And the drums which have been beating for 93 days, for 20 minutes of film, suddenly stop. It is suddenly, frighteningly, quiet.

CUAUHTEMOC
I am Cuauhtemoc.
Lead me to Malinche.
Let no harm come to my wife and
friends.

CUT TO:

INT. MOCTEZUMA'S PALACE. DAY.

Cortes sits on Moctezuma's mat as Cuauhtemoc is led in.

The Royal Emissary is at Cortes' side. His Wet Nurse hovers a few feet behind.

Cortes rises and touches the ground, then his chest, then his head: "My heart and my mind welcome you."

Cuauhtemoc, looking very much like Moctezuma, bows in reply.

CUAUHTEMOC
I have done all I could to defend
my city.
As the victor, you have sacrificed
my people to your God.
(kneels, indicates Cortes'
sword, and lowers his head)
I beg you: rid me of my life.

CORTES
Please. You are still the Emperor
and will be treated with honor.
(MORE)

CORTES (CONT'D)
 A Spaniard respects valor even in
 an enemy.
 And this is your wife?

Behind Cuauhtemoc we see CUAUHTEMOC'S WIFE, a girl of 16,
 Cuauhtemoc nods.

Cortes rises and kisses her hand.

CORTES (CONT'D)
 The youngest daughter of the great
 Moctezuma. I loved your father and
 know your sister well.
 But you are even more beautiful...

Marina translates.

Cuauhtemoc's wife blushes.

CORTES (CONT'D)
 I will take good care of you, as I
 promised your father.

Little ambiguity as to what this means.

Cortes turns back to Cuauhtemoc:

CORTES (CONT'D)
 Great Speaker, there is one thing I
 must ask: Where is the gold? The
 riches? We have searched your
 city...

As Marina translates, Cuauhtemoc shakes his head.

CUAUHTEMOC
I do not know. Some say it was
thrown into the lake.

His eyes are clear. Telling the truth.

Cortes nods, seems to accept this, but a grunt comes from behind him.
 The Royal Emissary gesturing. Cortes' jaw tightens and he nods.
 Apparently they've had some previous discussion. Cortes motions for
 Sandoval to go to the Emissary:

ROYAL EMISSARY
 Tell the Soldiers to burn
 Cuauhtemoc's feet. Burn them till
 he remembers.

Sandoval, his face flickering with anger, returns to Cortes.

SANDOVAL
 Is this your order too?

Cortes glances with barely concealed contempt at the Emissary.

SANDOVAL (CONT'D)
Then prevent it.

CORTES
This is no longer war. We must bow
our heads to the king or he will
cut them off.

SANDOVAL
But what of courage?

CORTES
Useless.

SANDOVAL
Honor?

CORTES
We can conquer the world, but we
cannot save this man from torture.

Sandoval stares at Cortes.

SANDOVAL
I will not order it.

Cortes' jaw tightens. He turns, whispers to a nearby SOLDIER. The
Soldier goes off to prepare the torture.

Sandoval is still staring, contemptuously, at Cortes.

CUAUHTEMOC
Malinche, if I am still Chief of
the Aztecs, I must ask one thing:
that my people be allowed to leave
this city in safety, for here only
starvation and pestilence remain.

CORTES
(nods; tells his men:)
Peaceful evacuation may begin
immediately.
(to Cuauhtemoc)
Go. Go now and rest.

Cuauhtemoc nods and bows.

The Soldier who is to arrange the foot-burning leads Cuauhtemoc away.

Cuauhtemoc's wife starts to follow -

CORTES (CONT'D)
Sadly, the rules of war dictate
that men, who are prisoners, must
be kept apart from their families.

Cuauhtemoc's wife is led in a different direction.

Marina watching this.

Cortes looks at her, at Sandoval. To Sandoval:

CORTES (CONT'D)
What is it?

SANDOVAL
Nothing.

CORTES
(to Marina, re: Cuauhtemoc's
wife)
Is she my first mistress?
(to Sandoval)
Is this the first time we burn
someone?

Beat.

MARINA
Sire? Do you need me now?
For translation?

He stares at her. Was there some disrespect in her attitude or was he imagining it?

CORTES
No.
But stay. You of all people deserve
some reward for this amazing
conquest.
(beat)
Would you like to be an honest
woman?

MARINA
I have always been so, sire.
Certainly with you.

CORTES
Yes, but you deserve to be married.

MARINA
I know I am already.

Her look says: To you.

He looks at her for a long moment. We feel his impulse to embrace her, to follow through on his love, his passion.

And her eyes say she is ready... Though of course, as an Indian, she will accept anything.

Finally he looks away from her -

CORTES
Sandoval. Don't you think Marina
deserves a proper Christian
ceremony?

SANDOVAL
 (pleased, touched)
 Yes, Captain.

CORTES
 But who should be the groom?

The cold question moves like ice through Sandoval's heart.

SANDOVAL
 The one who loves her.

CORTES
 Must that "one" marry her?

SANDOVAL
 It would be an act worthy of
 Cortes. To say across this land
 that Spaniard and Indian are now
 joined.

Again, for an instant, Cortes himself is caught by this impulse. But
 once again it turns.

CORTES
 How sweet. How simple.

Cortes glances at the Royal Emissary.

Sandoval blinks, realizing...

SANDOVAL
 What? You...? You mean if you wed a
 "savage," it might impede your
 chances for nobility?

CORTES
 It would.
 But surely I'm not the only
 candidate. There must be others who
 desire this lovely squaw.
 (looks around the room, then
 back at Sandoval)
 Perhaps even you would...?
 (before Sandoval can answer)
 No. Of course not, I'm sorry...

We know Sandoval would marry her, does love her, but Cortes does not
 really want to risk losing her affections by proposing such a match.
 He quickly:

Moves away from Sandoval, goes down the line of Spanish
 soldiers...and stops in front of DON JARAMILLO, a man remarkable only
 for his total absence of remarkable qualities.

CORTES (CONT'D)
 Pardon me, Captain, you are Don...
 (barely remembering name)
 Jaramillo, are you not?

JARAMILLO

Yes, sire.

CORTES

Would you take this lovely woman
for your bride?

Jaramillo's paralyzed. Is this a trick? Is Cortes seeking a pretext
for a beheading?

JARAMILLO

Well, I wouldn't presume to -

CORTES

I am asking you to marry her! Do
you accept?!

JARAMILLO

Yes, sir. Of course, sir. I'd be
honored to sleep w - to marry -
your
(mistress)
...I mean to say -

CORTES

And you, Marina, would you take
this man for a husband?

She stares at Cortes. Wounded. Sorry for him. And yet knowing,
understanding... everything.

MARINA

It would be a great great honor...
to be a Spanish noblewoman.

CORTES

Father Olmeda. Please take this
couple to some distant room and
perform the holy sacrament.

Olmeda bows, offended but obedient, and starts away.

Jaramillo follows.

Marina does not move.

They look at each other. An exquisitely painful moment. Cortes is
doing what - by the ethics of his time - was the very best and
noblest thing he could do. But it is still offensive to his own
heart, and to Marina's, and to ours.

CORTES (CONT'D)

Do not forget...in your marital
bliss ...that you are still on
call, day and night, to perform
translation.

MARINA

I am, as always, at your service.

She bows deeply...and backs away, eyes on him... Finally she turns to follow her husband.

Cortes turns his back on her...and on the entire company. Goes to a window. Tears in his eyes...

Sandoval follows.

SANDOVAL

Sir.

Cortes will not look at him.

But somehow, when he finally does, his eyes are dry.

CORTES

Yes, my son.

SANDOVAL

W-w-what is happening?

Sandoval's nervousness has brought back his stutter.

CORTES

To me?

Haven't you heard?

I'm a God, I can do anything.

Sandoval stares at him in consternation, rage, despair...

SANDOVAL

I always said I would f-follow you
even to my death...and I've fought
with you many times at its brink...

But I can no longer...f-f

(fights the stutter)

follow you at all.

Cortes nods.

Long beat.

CORTES

And I no longer need you.

That is the hard truth.

(long beat)

Now I stand alone.

Sandoval withdraws.

Cortes stares out the window.

As he does, we realize that a horn is blowing outside, and we see that Cortes' order, requested by Cuauhtemoc, is already being carried out. The Aztecs are leaving the city.

Old men, women, children. Skeletal: hollow eyes, shriveled limbs. Look like survivors of Hiroshima.

Cortes watches them go.

DIAZ (V.O.)

It was two years before Cortes was
proclaimed Governor of New Spain.
The job quickly bored him.

Cortes turns from the window and lowers his eyes.

DIAZ (V.O.) (CONT'D)

He set off again and again to
conquer new lands, to repeat his
glory, but he never did anything
comparable.

(beat)

Neither did anyone else.

Cortes turns back to face the room.

Marina is gone.

Sandoval is gone.

Everyone else is waiting on him...

He sees that they would wait forever. Literally.

DIAZ (V.O.) (CONT'D)

People ask: was he a great man?
Undoubtedly.
A good man?
No. A good man never would have
achieved these things.

With an air of command that is unassailable, Cortes shouts:

CORTES

Raise the purple pendant of
Castile!

CUT TO:

EXT. PALACE. DAY.

The purple Castilian flag flaps in the breeze above the city. Below
it:

The Aztec exodus.

Broken bodies, vessels for broken spirits.

Tzilacatzin: still alive but somehow no longer a Giant. His eyes are
deep and black, shoulders stooped; the skin hangs off his body as if
he were an old man.

But the faces of the children are what is impossible to watch: so
young yet void, without soul.

Following our impulse to avert our eyes, we look away, up into the sky:

Far overhead, a Golden Eagle is flying.

Flying away.

Not in the same direction the people are going.

No. Somewhere else.

Into hiding...

or seclusion...

or extinction.

CUT TO:

EXT. ORANGE GROVES. DAY.

Children (white, Indian, mestizo, and mulatto) are playing happily in a grove of orange trees laden with fruit. Nearby, BERNAL DIAZ as an old man sits at a wooden table writing with a quill.

DIAZ (V.O.)

Three years later, Cortes ordered Cuauhtemoc hung, on dubious charges of treason.

He pauses, looks out at the orange trees, resumes.

DIAZ (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Aztec civilization was destroyed. Their spirit broken, their Gods discredited, the people died out. If you travel here to Mexico, only a few statues and pieces of jewelry remain.

The orange trees are shimmering in the wind...

DIAZ (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Today, the third of April, 1576, I look back and my heart is filled with pride at what we accomplished.
(beat)

But my eyes are filled with tears.

FADE OUT...

PRODUCTION NOTE:

The battles on pages 16-7, 42-3, and 45-6 are designed to be all shot at the same location, using the same extras. Ideally, the location would be carefully chosen so that three different wide-shots, facing three different directions, can suggest different places.

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