

Plaxetolt, smoking a pipe of peyote, reflected on the group's encounter with the Emperor. It had gone well, he thought. No one made a fuss about Zozollan, and the Emperor received what he had to say.

The priests, still fuming over the matter, sought to discredit the following by exposing Plaxetotl's relationship with Ayalca. When the gathering left the palace, he had stopped to talk to her, while she cavorted with several other aristocratic women, sharing beauty tips. He was noticed by several of them, some who were already aware “through the grapevine” of his interest in her. This would surely enrage the Emperor they thought. Matlaluege stayed longer, conferring with Montezuma. A new respect was gained between the two men, whether or not Montezuma would heed his advice.

In deep thought, Plaxetotl received a message from the Gods. A vision of the girl Ayalca came to him. She was surrounded by palace guards, and Montezuma held her neck by a yoke. He pondered on this for a while, sitting by a group of trees, on a hill near the water.

Should he go to her, he wondered? The more he thought about it, that would be a bad idea. The particulars of the vision made it seem as if that would be a trap. He decided instead, to see his brother, Tetzuahtl.

Tetzuahtl was a Jaguar Knight, like the day he was born on. They would dress for battle in jaguar hides, and held a high status among the soldiers of the army. Many of their days would be filled with training, on a field outside of the city on the mainland.

Plaxetotl took with him his favorite walking stick, carved out of oak. Taking the beautiful walk, from his camp to the training area, he appreciated the nature of the Yucatan Valley. The cacti, pine and oak trees, deer, and smaller mammals, mixed together to form a very unique environment.

Friar Bernardino de Sahagun once wrote, of the Mexica:

How the gods had their beginning and where they began is not well known.
But this is plain, [that] there at Tenochtitlan...when yet there was darkness,
there all the gods gathered themselves together, and they debated who would
bear the burden, who would carry on his back – would become – the sun.
And when the sun came to arise, then all [the gods] died that the sun might
come unto being...And thus the ancient ones thought it to be.

This was true. Quetzalcoatl took on a great burden to create their Empire, Plaxetotl thought. But there were other gods. They all had sacrificed themselves to benefit humankind. However, paying them back by human sacrifices seemed contradictory to him. Could this one God, that Nezahualcoyotl wrote of, truly be, he thought even further? And if so, would he be the one to end their Empire?

The Mexica believed four suns began creation. Ometeotl, male and female, had four sons: Tezcatlipoca, Xipe Totec, Hitzilopchtli, and Quetzalcoatl. The last two were to create other gods, the earth and people. The cycle of creation and destruction began with these four and continues today.

There had been four “suns”. Each was controlled by a different god, with people of a distinctive race. Each was destroyed differently. Tezcatlipoca ruled the first, with a race of giants. Jaguars destroyed the sun and ate the giants, destroying the earth. The second was run by Quetzalcoatl, when humans lived on acorns. Hurricanes destroyed the sun, and the people turned into monkeys. During the third sun, Tlaloc reigned, and the people ate aquatic seeds. A fiery rain destroyed the world, and humans became dogs, turkeys and butterflies. The fourth sun, of

Clalchiuhtlicue, saw gatherers that ate wild seeds. They turned into fish during a great flood. The fifth sun in the current age. Tonatiuh (the sun god) presides over it, and the people eat maize. It is to be destroyed by earthquakes, and the people devoured by sky monsters. However, Plaxetotl thought of the other civilizations of the valley that had died out, and he prayed for the survival of their own race.

Tetzuahtl lunged forward with his macuahuitl, and struck the feather covered, wooden shield on the arm of his sparring partner. The blow from the obsidian bladed weapon cracked the center of the defensive object, as his partner reeled backwards from the force of it.

“Good strike,” he commended Tetzuahtl, who answered,

“Thanks”.

Over the exertions of the participants in their area of the field was the commands of their Captain, Huapitoaltet.

“Press forward! Always press forward!”

Tetzuahtl's partner, Iltextuan, smirked at him.

“He does mean business.” He said, who was also a Jaguar Knight.

With that, Tetzuahtl pressed on harder, crashing once again with his sword into Iltextuan's shield, who fell down to the ground after his advance. “That's even better!” Iltextuan exclaimed, with a smile.

To be a Jaguar Knight one normally had to be of noble birth, but Tetzuahtl's outstanding performance in combat, the capturing of many enemy soldiers, had given him advancement through the ranks, which was possible but not frequent. He, previously, had been what one Spanish chronicler explained as a “Caballeros Padros” or “Gray Knight”, who had the privilege to wear distinctive garments and walk the streets sandalled. He did not have to pay tribute and was given goods from the tribute warehouses. He could drink in public and keep concubines. He could also enter the royal palace at will and dine at the royal table, which he did on occasion.

Of “the man dexterous in battle”:

Such honour he won that no one might be adorned [like him]; no one in his house might assume all his finery. For in truth [because] of his dart and his shield there was eating and drinking, and one was arrayed in cape and breechclout. For verily in Mexico were we, and thus persisted the reign of Mexico.

It was only through exemplary performance and divine will that he had achieved membership in the elite warrior society of the Eagle and Jaguar Knights. He was truly blessed, and others, as well as his brother, saw that about him and were drawn to him.

Looking up from the attention of his downed partner, Tetzuahtl noticed the familiar strides of his brother, with walking stick, nearing the edge of the training grounds. He asked his captain for permission to break and it was granted.

“Good to see you again.” He said, walking towards his older brother, who came forward as well to greet him.

“Same here.” Plaxetolt expressed, embracing him.

“What brings you here?”

“Well, we haven't talked in a while and I had some concerns I wanted to share with you.”

“Go ahead.” His brother assured him.

“Well, I had a vision,” Plaxetotl continued. “In it a representation of danger to Ayalca was given. But I wanted to talk to you before I proceeded any further, for also in this vision Montezuma and the palace guards were presented.”

Plaxetotl had a way of talking in codes that could confuse some, but Tetzuahtl realized that they were not totally alone, and understood his brother's need to be discreet.

"I saw her recently, when dining at the palace." He offered. "But I saw no signs of danger." Plaxetotl thought for a while then asked, "Did she speak to you?"

"No, but there were many officials around, and I think she did not want to arouse any suspicion." Tetzuahtl was aware of Plaxetotl's visit to the palace, and the possible conspiracy that threatened him.

"Good." The relieved philosopher answered. He was happy to know that those close to him were aware of the circumstances surrounding his fate. "How are you doing?" He asked his brother, so as not to make their meeting totally one-sided.

"Fine," he answered.

"It looks as if you're training more extensively." Plaxetotl noted, observing the happenings on the busy training field.

"We are." His brother answered, realizing his brother was starting to pry. "But we have no official orders." He was referring to the relative state of peace that now existed.

"I heard you went home." He said, hoping to change the subject.

"I did." Plaxetotl answered. "And I found things well. However, there was this one thing about the Capullec--"

Before he could finish Tetzuahtl was summoned back by his Captain.

"I have to go." He remorsefully told his brother, who answered,

"I know. Go ahead."

"We'll talk later." Tetzuahtl offered.

And with that he returned to his duties. Plaxetotl was satisfied their meeting and returned to the camp. Along the way he would have plenty of time to consider what his faithful brother had told him.

Matlaluege was astounded by the Emperor's grasp of the situation, but would he follow through, he wondered? It was clear to him that a reversal of policy was needed to ensure the safety of the Azteca. He told Montezuma this before he left, hoping his attitude towards such words had changed. Other such divines had been imprisoned for providing false information, but escaped. He didn't even want that possibility to befall him or his following.

Sitting in a chair outside of his small village home, Juan watched the natives go about the business of their daily chores. He had time off from tax-collecting, as all possible payments had been made. He had been very busy with those duties for the past two weeks, and Pavel had him scouring every corner of Santo Domingo for delinquent colonists.

All we need is enough money to reach Cuba, and pay for armament and weapons, he thought. The money for other expenses had already been saved up by him and, he hoped, Eduardo too.

Eduardo had been saving money, but much of it he'd spent on whores, gambling and other vices of the exotic island. The two did not spend much time together, as they probably should have, seeing the need to coordinate their plans. Largely, it was because of Juan Miguel's marriage, and also because of their respective workloads.

Spain was neglecting the new empire. Isabel the Catholic had been charmed by Columbus. She was even interested, sporadically, in the well-being of "her" Indians. But her husband never was. His main interest was to secure the wealth of the Indies. The late Queen left him half of the income from the islands. But it was well known that the Indies were in decline.

Through most of his reign, Ferdinand left the affairs of the colonies to Juan Rodriguez de Fonseca, Bishop of Burgos, and after 1511, to the Archbishop of Rossano, a former protege of the late Isabel. Fonseca was feared during this time, afterwards despised. Peter Martyr called him a man "of

illustrious birth, genius and initiative”.

Juan had decided to stay with Mapecha's people, instead of the colonists. He helped build their small home, of semi-Spanish style, that blended in rather well with the huts of the Tianos. It was a modest beginning, to say the least, but she was close to her mother, and the exposure to the native populace gave him a chance to understand their world better.

Witnessing first hand their suffering, he had a platform with which to appeal to the local administrator, Fr. Hernandez, also. The friar had known, all along, that something like this might happen, when the young idealist first opened his mouth at the dinner table. And before Juan and Eduardo could ask for any help for their journey, he was already making arrangements for their departure.

“Come inside.” The adventurer's young wife called to him from their home, in a language mixed with Spanish and Tiano. It was a call he dared not heed, and he left from outside to go to her.

Her soft kisses entreated him to more, and he quickly forgot his desires to leave the island. He removed the few threads of clothing on her scarcely clothed body, and held her close, falling down gently on the blanket covered, grassy mattress they used for a bed. He'd made love to a lot of women before, but none like his wife. Her soft caresses and warm demeanor incubated him from much of the coldness he'd known. Running his fingers through her long, dark hair, he flirted with the paradise that was her being, and opened his heart wider to the New World.

When Don Eduardo finally stopped by, after a long hiatus, he brought with him news of their possible departure. Mapecha quietly left as the two discussed the information.

“Perez is heading out to Cuba soon, with financing from Friar Hernandez.” He explained.

“How soon?” The intrigued Juan Miguel asked.

“About a month from now.” His friend answered. Juan would have to have to think things over. He'd grown deeper in his relationship with his wife over the past few months. Passing the pangs of anxiety that come with the ceremony of marriage to an emotional point of no return. At times he wondered if he was going too deep, realizing his desire to depart for new lands.

“We aren't getting any richer here.” Eduardo pointed out to him, noticing his lack of excitement.

“I know, but things are changing. I hope this trip leaves on time, or-”

“Or what?” His friend interrupted.

“Jesus, I might have a family.” Eduardo could see, and had for some time, that his friend was sprouting roots on the island, but he wasn't making any great strides towards leaving himself either. If the Friar got word of the debt he was quickly amassing he might not be able to go. A fact Juan was not absent in pointing out to him. At any rate, the news was welcome, and now all Juan had to do was tell his wife. Eduardo would have to lay low and exercise some restraint.

Reviewing the manifest of upcoming departures from the island. Hannibal came across Perez's. And, for some reason, his heart lightened up, and he thought, for the first time, of leaving Hispaniola. His work had been rewarding, but he thought maybe there was something else out there for him. Up to now, day-to-day labor was all he had known, but he was beginning to think of other possibilities for his life. Far from desiring to be a conquistador, and enslaving other peoples, he thought that maybe he could learn more about the dynamic of what he was experiencing, what they all were experiencing, in this “New World” of the Americas.