



Mikistli (Death)

The Mexican Epic Series

Vol. 1

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David Martinez

This book is for sale at

http://leanpub.com/mikistli_death-mexepic_vol1

This version was published on 2014-09-04



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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The cover image is a mural by Roberto Cueva del Río - “Malinche con Cortés.”. Photo by Jujomx. This file is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license.

Some Inside Baseball

I will get better at this, but you may notice the layout is not quite right yet. As a work in progress, I am having a little trouble getting Scrivener (where I write this work) and Leanpub (where I am currently publishing) to work quite right. Loving the process, as I get to write Ruby scripts (after all, I am a computer geek). But it does make for awkward reading at times.

You will also find lots of places with “TODO” (my mark to go back and fix something) and notes for myself throughout, where I need to move things around. Of course as more characters are completed, I keep changing chapters back on the beginning to introduce them. You are joining me in this journey still pretty early, so you get to see how the sausage is made, so to speak. It’s not always pretty, but you may find it interesting.

Thank you for your patience on this. I will get this working properly as we get closer to the final release of the book.

Sample Content

This is a sample for the book “Mikistly (Death)”.

I am publishing this via leanpub in the hope that enough people will join me in providing their thoughts on this book.

The book will remain at a very reduced price during development. Once it is 85-90% close to completion, it will raise price, but everyone who has purchased it at the reduced early price (hopefully meaning you) will receive all updates! Isn’t lean publishing great?

If you haven’t done so already, you may purchase the book at <http://mexicanepic.com>

If you choose to purchase, thank you for joining me in this journey. If you only prefer to read the sample, I also thank you for reading these words. Either way, I hope this helps you become as passionate about history as I am.

Please Note that the sample chapters here are from different portions of the beginning of the book, so it’s not in the exact same order as the purchased book. Also, the sample has no footnotes, but you will notice brackets for the footnote tag placeholders. This is a side effect of publishing.

Veracruz, modern era. A vacationer from Mexico City encounters a strange device. After an accident, she wakes up in 1519, prehispanic Mexico, as part of the Cortés Expedition. Will she save her Aztec past from annihilation? Or will she have the courage to change history and stop the upcoming holocaust? In this gripping Historic Novel, we follow the story of Xochitl, a woman from modern

Mexico who ends up a prisoner of time travel through an ancient Aztec device. The first part of the Mexican Epic series, we follow Xochitl through her personal story as the history of her peoples begins to unfold.. Experience Mexican history as you've never experienced it before

PREFACE

It is the blessing and curse of writing historical novels that most characters in your book are biographical characters, and already in a person's mindshare in one way or another. This book is certainly no exception to this.

Since this was the early 1500s however, very little is known about the people's actual character (and often of their actual physical appearance, particularly if no depictions were made of them) unless they were very famous, so I have taken license with that. Where I found it available, I have tried to keep to the character traits these people seemed to have had, when the person was described in a source close to their lifetimes and is corroborated by other sources (for example, this novel's Pedro de Alvarado is very abusive, and it is documented on sources of both Mexica and Spanish origin that indeed he was, and his appearance is commonly known through both realistic paintings and descriptions of his reddish-blonde hair from Native Americans who called him Tonatiuh). Where there was only one source mentioning how "wonderful" the person was (on both sides), I have taken that with a grain of salt.

This is because the history of the creation of the nation of Mexico has alternatively been portrayed as either a "*perpetrator-victim*" or "*civilizer-ignorant*" affair, with both concepts being a gross oversimplification. The Spanish and Aztec empires were two urban empires in their own right, and one does not create or grow an empire with stupid people at the helm. So instead I have used available evidence in way of descriptions and imagination to create backgrounds or this characters and locations and bring them to life as I believe they would have actually lived, with a mix of personalities such as you would find in any great society. I have attempted to do so respectfully and lovingly, as our Mexican heritage depends on both our parents.

So don't be afraid to identify with one character or another. If I have stayed true to the character I portrayed, I hope you will not have been disappointed.

With love for Mexico,

David Martinez

The Bus Station

The Central de Autobuses was a madhouse. Xochitl had made a reservation on a first class bus, and she was ready to start her vacation. The chaos of Mexico City's eastern bus station at this peak hour (locally named TAPO) was the last she would have to put up with regards to life in the fast lane before she started her vacation. She was more than ready to leave the traffic, pollution and work stress.

Maybe that would solve the nightmares. That, or a therapist. She never remembered the nightmares. Only waking up crying, scared and with a deep sense of sorrow, but with no memory of the actual nightmare. It had never been bad, except for the last year or so. As a result, insomnia had set in - a vague fear of going to sleep, a nightmare some nights, and then waking up still tired. This was the pattern of her life lately.

Xochitl had lived all her life in Mexico City. So she was more than used to the fast-paced life, but the sleeplessness had made it very difficult to concentrate lately and she couldn't even remember the last time she had a vacation.

Her parents were both physicians, and biology came easy to her, which was why it was simple enough (and safe enough for her family life) to become a geneticist, currently doing research at the Centro Médico Nacional. It was awkward enough when she told her parents she would not fulfill their parents' desire to be a Doctor, and she nearly got sworn off when she went off with some history students to learn about the Mayas in the Yucatan peninsula - they would have killed her had she told them she really always wanted to be a historian.

Mexican women, particularly those who are single, stay close to their home and visit their family often. This is both a blessing and a curse, as the constant family love one came to expect from one's

parents can lead to dysfunction and friction as the children become adults and create their own lives, particularly when their lives aren't what their parents expected. This was particularly true in her rigid family. So she had decided it was time for a change, asked for a long vacation and booked herself a trip to Veracruz.

She had only visited Veracruz once as a child; her parents usually took her to Acapulco, which was much easier to get to by car and where her parents owned a timeshare (as much as one can really own those things). She didn't even tell her parents she was going on vacation to avoid them railroading her and forcing her to go there. She had had enough of their efforts to show off to friends, buying property here and property there, getting into debt unnecessarily. Unlike them, she was perfectly ok both with her skin color and her close indigenous ancestry. So freaking what if her paternal grandparents were almost 100% Aztec? They worked hard and put dad through school, and him seeing poor people through all those accidents in the rural areas is what drove him to his present career as one of the top Trauma specialists in the country. Besides, it wasn't their fault that Mom's parents, proud "white Mexicans", swore them both off when she tried to please both her own mother (Flor) and her parents-in-law by naming her Flor in Nahuatl (Xochitl)? At least she didn't end up named *Achacauhtli*[^cf1] like her maternal grandparents insisted had to be done due to grandpa's dream of her being a great leader (he was a wonderful old man, but he could get pretty weird sometimes). Now that would have been an awkward experience at her private high school. No, Xochitl was common enough and a pretty name. It suited her just fine.

So here she was, by herself in a bustling bus station, ready to go visit Veracruz. A lot of families were milling about, and also plenty of humble people ready to purchase a ticket back to their small towns, to spend the weekend with their families before heading back to work on the millions of Mexico City's menial jobs.

It was one of these that caught her eye, an older Nahua woman with many bundles of flowers.

The flower woman looked at Xochitl intently. Native Mexicans

don't open their eyes wide a lot. But this was a stare. The old lady stood up, leaving the flowers on the ground, and walked to Xochitl directly.

- "Achacauhtli Malinali", she said. And gave her a flower.

The orange blossom was a *cempazuchitl*[^cf2]. The flower of the dead.

- "Thank you", Xochitl said. My name is Xochitl.

The old woman didn't answer. Instead, she just said something else in Nahuatl.

- "Ayaiztiuitz[^cf3]?"

The Nahua woman turned around and left.

Moctezuma the Second

Emperor Moctezuma II, the tall, thin 40 year old ruler of the known world, walked out of the Calmecac after addressing the newly graduating priests on the history and the future of the Empire. He smiled as he looked at the horizon. Things really could not be better for him and his Mexica people, he reflected.

Today the empire was nearly a thousand miles squared, easily the largest empire in existence. The vivid colors of the 4500 square yard sacred precinct, nursed by the serpents etched on the surrounding walls, stared back at him in majesty, further enhanced by the sun's twilight rays. The skull rack at the base of the Twin temples, dedicated to Huitzilopochtli and Tlaloc, the God of rain, silently sang tales of Aztec conquests. Huitzilopochtli could look down upon the sacred precinct and see his sister and enemy Coyolxauhqui's dismembered body, the blood of the new sacrificial victims from the temples flowing on her image in order to provide him with an approximation of her appearance after he avenged the death of mother Coatlicue. This commemoration soothed and focused Huitzilopochtli's anger so he will continue to bless all the Aztec's endeavors in war.

For Coyolxauhqui had led her four hundred siblings to kill mother Coatlicue after she bore two more children, Quetzalcoatl and Xolotl, with the plan to kill them as well once he had done murdering her own mother. She never expected Huitzilopochtli to come out of his dead mother's womb, fully armed and ready for battle, as a God of war surely would. Huitzilopochtli then killed and dismembered his sister Coyolxauhqui. Later on Huitzilopochtli would have a son, who rebelled and had to be killed, his heart thrown in a lagoon.

Generations later, Huitzilopochtli ordered the Nahuatl priests to search for the heart and build a city over it. As a sign of where to find it, he told him there would be an eagle perched on a cactus,

devouring a serpent. After finding it in an islet in the middle of lake Texcoco, they founded their city on the lake. With the God of Rain and the God of War behind them, nobody could stop them.

Long gone were the days of them scraping an existence in a tiny rock in the middle of lake Texcoco, like they had done under Tlatoani Tenoch, the founder of Tenochtitlan. Acamapichtli, Tenoch's successor, had been clever in marrying the daughters of the neighboring tribes - which stopped the persecution they suffered at their hands - and by extending the Chinampa system to essentially will a city out of the water. The natural moat provided by the lake made invasion difficult so they needed less people to garrison the city, and the alliances, started under Acamapichtli himself, provided everything that couldn't be grown or created inside the city. But they were still under the umbrella of Azcapotzalco, and the people were poor and made to wear maguey clothing as a sign of lower caste. And if they had a natural moat, it didn't seem to stop the powerful Azapotzalcans from invading and pillaging.

His son, Huitzihuitl, married the daughter of Azcapotzalco's tlatoani[^cf4] to try to obtain better conditions. Didn't really do him any good, all those fights with his father in law ended up in open warfare anyway. But hey, at least the people could dress in cotton then, and they did end up ruling Texcoco out of that sad affair.

The next ruler was Chimalpopoca. Poor sod only lasted 10 years, having been captured in war and taken to Azcapotzalco. His spirit couldn't stand the ridicule and starvation that he endured, so he killed himself. Didn't those savages know that the civilized way to end the life of a warrior is by *sacrificing him to the Gods*? But he did benefit the empire by introducing a separation of temple life and state, which brought the federalism needed for such a large population.

But grandfather Izcoatl was Moctezuma's personal favorite. After Chimalpopoca's death he continued the war and eventually defeated the hated Azcapotzalcans, turning them into a client state, and burning all the historical codices in order to rewrite them for good measure. To avoid other possible future security problems, he

created the Aztec Triple alliance with Texcoco and Tlacopan. So what if Tlacopan was tiny? They were powerful, and inviting them to share into the alliance had defanged them. Today Tlacopan was barely a suburb. With the core territory finally safe and under the grip of a Mexica Huey Tlatoani[^cf5], all Aztecs - Mexica, Texcocan and Tlacopan, were free to start expanding the empire.

His father, Moctezuma I, was the first great conqueror. The Huastecs fell, then the Totonacs. That was the beginning of the fabulous new wealth. Rubber, Cocoa, Cotton, Fruit and Seashells, and of course the very exclusive Quetzal feathers[^cf6]. And it was nice to have all that silver and gold[^cf7] to adorn the body.

His own campaign against the Zapotecs had been a fantastic success, and now the Aztec Empire was cast well South all the way past the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. Only Teotitlan and those impossibly stupid Tlaxcalans were still resisting, though they were paying some tribute and engaging in the flower wars now.. They would fall like all the others as they lost their best warriors to the sacrifice to the gods every time they participated in the flower wars[^cf8].

Topiltzin

Topiltzin waited in the hallway. He was a little nervous, as this was the first time he had direct audience with the emperor. He was ready for whatever his majesty needed, however.

The first time he saw the emperor had been to receive an award after a flower war. He had a special gift given to him by Huitzilopochtli, the God of War. He was, bar none, the best at capturing soldiers.

At school - compulsory for every Nahua, even the slaves - he was the most eager student. Philosophy, history and math were all easy, but what he really excelled at was ball game practice. His physical ability was second to none, and his teachers always praised him for it.

It was this physical ability that made him interested in martial life. An Aztec soldier was a professional, and he decided to get started early. He was only 16, a full year before becoming a man, that he became a *Tlamani* and a *Cuextecatl* on the same day, with the capture of his first and second warriors. Ceremonially eating from two warriors on the same day put their power in him, and he had felt invincible ever since. During school break, he lied about his age and requested to assist with battle as a civilian, and they believed him! After capturing the warriors he was given the characteristic conical hat. Only two days later, however, he captured his third.

This made him the first 16 year old to become a Papalotl. He was so proud to show off the butterfly banner he got for the next round of fighting when he came back to school.

This is how he became the first 17 year old in recent memory to go directly to Eagle Warrior. He chose the eagle because of his grace and swiftness in battle. Jaguar Warriors were more ferocious, but took stupid risks, he thought. They were just as likely to be captured in battle themselves. But the constant practice of jumping, turning and thrusting the Macahuitl[^cf9] gave him a grace that made it

both incredible to watch and deadly in combat.

Some warriors favored the MacuahUILZOCTLI[^cf10] instead. It was certainly shorter, and the sorry state of their ChimalliS[^cf11] after battle made it evident that things had gotten a bit too close. And while he wasn't advocating to stay behind and throw arrows with the tlahuitolli[^cf12] or the atlatl[^cf13] either, he certainly didn't want to expose his own torso to a blade if he could help it. Battle was as much to avoid capture as it was to capture others.

For five years he fought as an Eagle. And finally a few years ago, he was called forth and inducted as one of the Cuachicqueh. His head was shaved, and his face was painted red on one side and blue on the other. He was given a tlahuitzli[^cf14], which he was wearing today.

As a Cuachic, his role was special. Not only was it serving as shock troops, leading the assault, but he had since been given important tasks directly for the Tenochca government. And now here he was, waiting to meet the most important man on earth, for a special assignment.

The door opened and he was ushered into the throne room.

Moctezuma was impeccable as usual, more so in this immaculately clean environment than on the battlefield. His penacho[^cf15] was enormous, a beautiful combination of quetzal feathers and gold.

- "Please, Topiltzin, come on inside", said Moctezuma.

Without a word, Topiltzin came inside and bowed to his emperor.

- "How aware are you of international relations", asked Moctezuma.

- "The west is secure, sir. As far as Acapulco and Michoacán, it is quiet and peaceful. The South, from Cuahunahuac[^cf16] to Tehuantepec[^cf17], is also peaceful. Our only real problems lie at the east, with the Tlaxcalans. The Otomís are resentful, but irrelevant. Sir", was Topiltzin's response.

- "Good, very good", said Moctezuma. "As you know, trade beyond the Eastern Gulf requires the East to be secure. Some of the stories I have been hearing from the Mayans are unnerving. Tall men, with hair on their face, harassing the towns, asking questions and killing people. And now there's report that the giant vessels

they have come in have appeared in the sea where I send for my huachinango[^{cf18}]. They're probably tall tales, but I really need to know. The area is hostile though, and I will need some ears."

- "I am at your service, sire."

- "Do you know why I picked you?", said Moctezuma

- "No sir", came the response.

- "I picked you because you know how to survive.", Moctezuma said. "You were an eagle warrior and now you are shock troops, but you know when to fight and when to fold. I can't have a hothead getting himself killed for what we need to do. I need the best warrior, to gather intelligence and get himself back here, alive. It's no use to send someone who will end up dead, the information dying with him. Now go find out about these men. Find out what they can do, find out where they come from. Come back when you have something. And report back directly to me. You are dismissed."

- "Yes sir."

As Topiltzin left, he was a bit miffed. This was the special mission? Killing an emperor, poisoning a water supply, sabotaging weapons before battle, all those he could understand. But checking up on legends of tall, hair-faced monkeys? This was what he was going to risk his life for?

Still, the Emperor's wishes were the emperor's wishes. He had been trained to take a spear head for that man.

Tlaxcaltecas

Xicotencatl the Elder paced around his palace in Tizatlán. The situation in Tlaxcala - the confederation of Ocotelolco, Quiahuiztlán, Tepeticpac and Tizatlán - was becoming untenable. Years earlier, they thought that together they could deal with their enemy. Ever since the Aztec triple alliance was made to create that empire to the West it had been nothing but trouble. You'd think they were the only Toltecs around. In fact, according to Xicotencatl's own wise men, Tlaxcalans also had plenty lot of Toltec blood in them, and Tlaxcalan poetry was so much better.. it was obvious who were the better artists. These upstarts were just invading anybody with higher education than them, and intermarrying them to pretend they ran the culture. They may have burned all books in the empire to get rid of the truth, but he had his sources and his own oral tradition. His people still *remembered*.

As much as Xicotencatl hated the Aztecs, he had to admit their empire was effective, and Tenochtitlán, their largest city, was a fearsome adversary; it was not only the skill of their warriors, but the sheer size of their main city. Often he would bring in his advisors - led by his son - and run scenarios for an counter-invasion led by his triple alliance - there was plenty of discontent with the status quo, even outside his realm - but even if they could, controlling an angry city of 300,000 people was well beyond their capabilities, despite what his hothead son Xicotencatl the Younger thought. And of course he was not going to be uncivilized enough to kill enemy warriors. They had to be captured and brought to temple like civilized people did. But just the logistics of controlling the enormous population and running the ceremonies to give the hearts of their warriors to the Gods made the proposition laughable. Despite this, they had come up with a pragmatic plan that would be effective if they could just solve the crazy logistics; his cities

were net providers of goods instead of importers like those of the Tenochcas[^{cf19}], so he could offer lower taxation to their client states because he didn't need the goods (a big advantage of avoiding those cities getting so large). It was in fact the only plan that could work - since the rule of Moctezuma I, Tlaxcalan access to the sea was cut, so no trade with Taínos[^{cf20}] (as little as they traded as it was). And they had also had cut access to the North and South, so trade with Mayas or Zapotecs was possible either. As a result, poverty and scarcity was rampant for his proud people. His own warriors were starting to grumble about his rule. Something would have to give, and soon.

Now he was surrounded in all directions by Aztec forces, and the Aztecs would force them into these invasive and superstitious flower wars, which did nothing to help either side, only to appease the Gods. And of course the gods help you if you didn't let the Aztecs win. It was a good thing that he started going around the Aztec's back - he had been developing new battle techniques in secret, as well as holding back the best warriors for years now, taking advantage of the fact that the Aztec army hadn't actually invaded them yet. Self-rule has its privileges, even if it isn't complete independence. If it came down to a real battle, his best warriors would surprise them. Maybe scare them enough to break the blockade.

But for now he had to let the status quo continue and pay them the tribute, as much as he resented it - he had enough trouble protecting his own empire and the cities around him, as well as the many noble rulers that had been forced into exile and he had provided refuge for. It was not worth causing trouble. He was still glad to keep those plans around though - you never new what the gods would bring tomorrow.

The pig farmer

The pig farmer was already in bed. His last customer had been hours ago. He was settling into his bed when an insistent knocking came. “That has to be a noble”, the farmer told his wife. “Stupid nobles always want to start a party late at night a few drinks in. He’ll probably want me to slaughter it and take it to his cooks, too.”

- “Quickly”, he said, “your pigs”
- “How many pigs do you need Sire?”
- “All of them”, Cortés replied.
- “But Sire, there will be no meat for Cuba..”
- “Do not question me, peon!”, Cortés cut him off, and ripping a gold medallion from his chest - he had already spent all the cash for the expedition - he threw it on the table, saying “this should be payment enough. Now go load them on my ships at the Docks immediately. Someone will meet you there.” And with that, he left.

He came back into his bedroom, still in shock. His wife was crying, worried about their fate once word got out there would not be any meat for the banquet at the *Palacio de Gobierno* to be held in two days.

- “How am I going to explain this to governor Velazquez?”, muttered the farmer.