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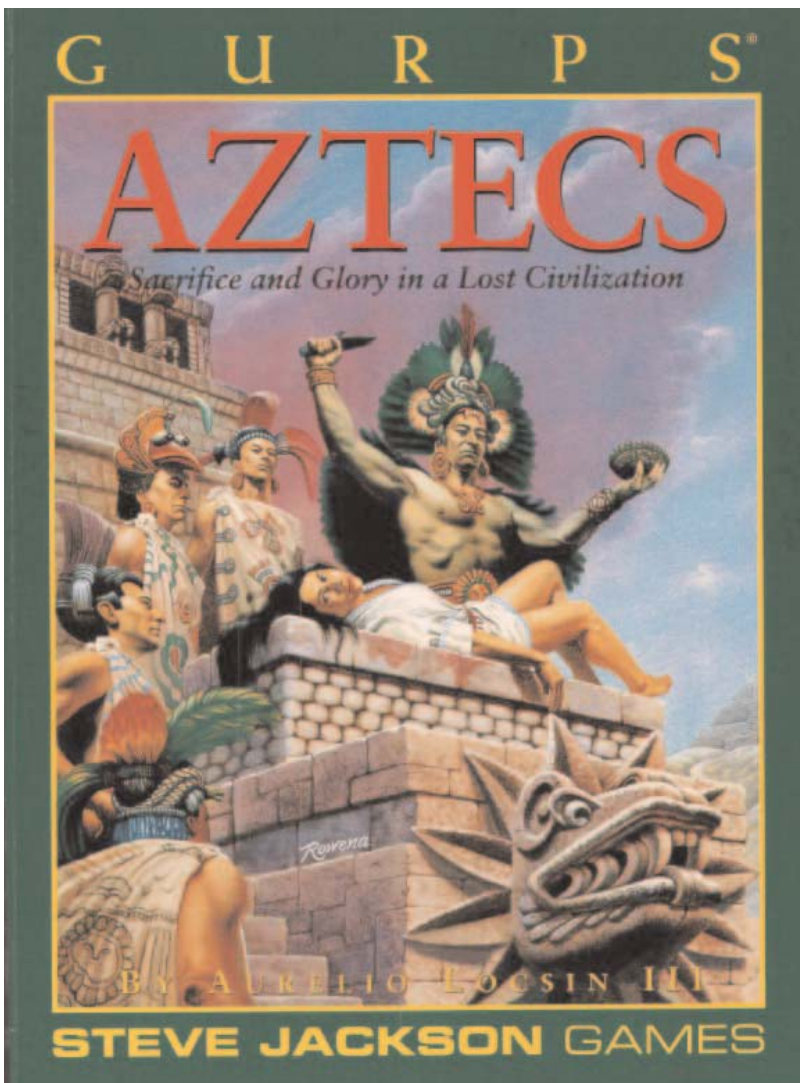
BLOOD AND SACRIFICE!

The empire of the Aztecs stretched from ocean to ocean. They worshipped hundreds of gods, kept elaborate calendars and built gigantic stone pyramids that still stand as testament to their might. Their relentless armies seemed unstoppable.

Then, in 1519, a few hundred Spanish invaders toppled it all.

To the Spanish, the Aztecs were monstrous savages . . . pagans who tore the living hearts from thousands of innocent victims to feed a bloody idol. They never understood the culture they were destroying . . . or the philosophy behind the cruelty. The Aztec society was totally alien, stranger than any fantasy land. Now you can visit the world of the Aztecs from the inside.

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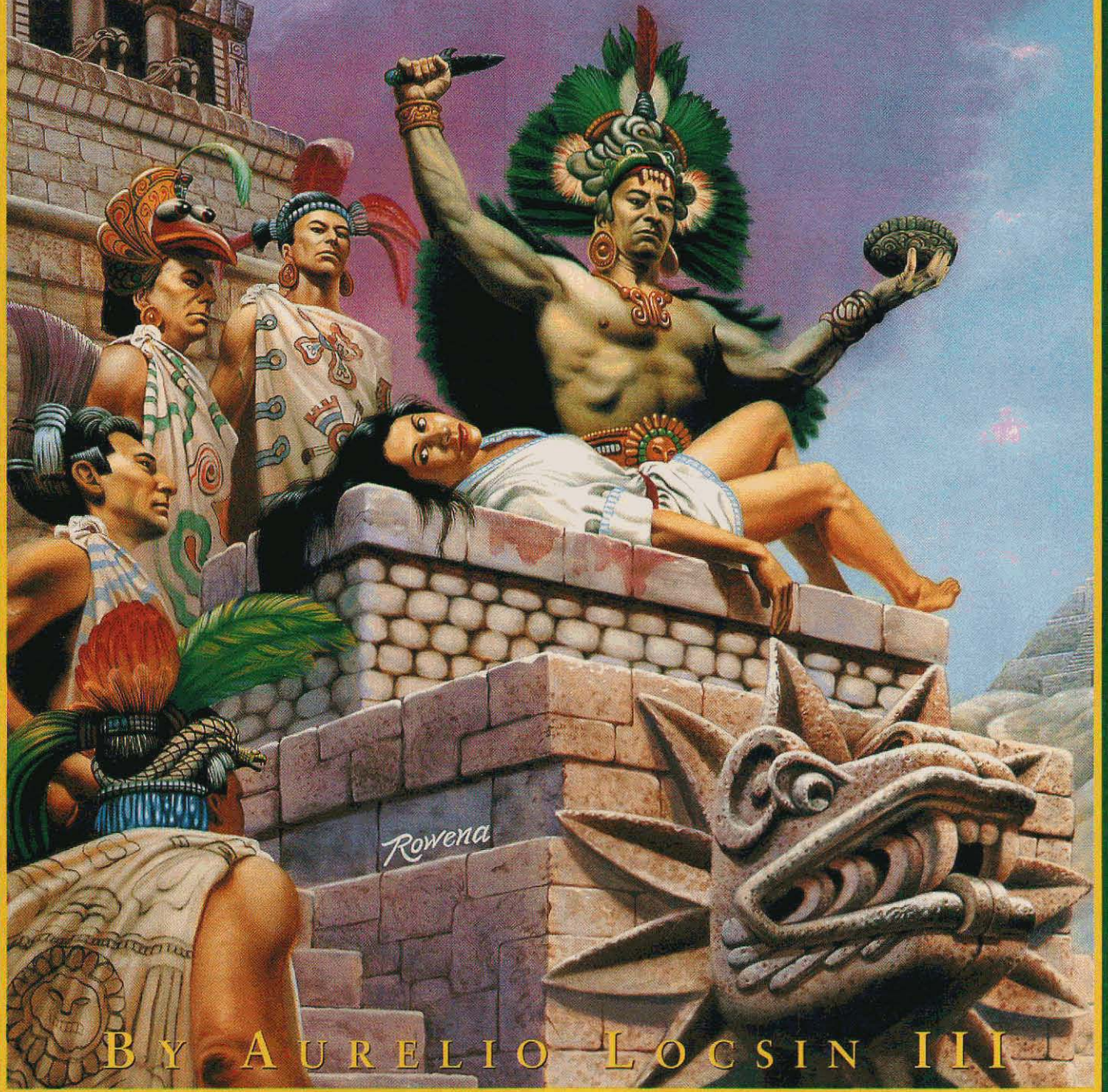


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AZTECS

Sacrifice and Glory in a Lost Civilization



BY AURELIO LOCSIN III

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

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Inside you'll find:

Aztec religion. Potent rituals and feasts to please their many gods, from the benign Quetzalcóatl to the evil lord Tezcatlipoca.

Aztec magic. Rules for shape-shifting, casting curses, and foretelling the future.

Sacrifice as a skill. Improve your fortune by feeding blood to the gods.

Aztec combat. Including the ritual Flower Wars — and the deadly ball-games in which the losing team was sacrificed.

The Aztec calendar. Using its elaborate system of portents, each Aztec character will have his own lucky and unlucky days.

Pochtecas. Travel with the merchant-adventurers who spied for the Emperor.



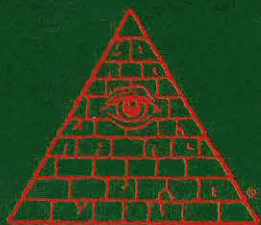
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Written by Aurelio Locsin III

Edited by Steve Jackson

Cover by Rowena

Illustrated by John Hartwell



STEVE JACKSON GAMES



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GURPS[®]

AZTECS

Sacrifice and Glory in a Lost Civilization

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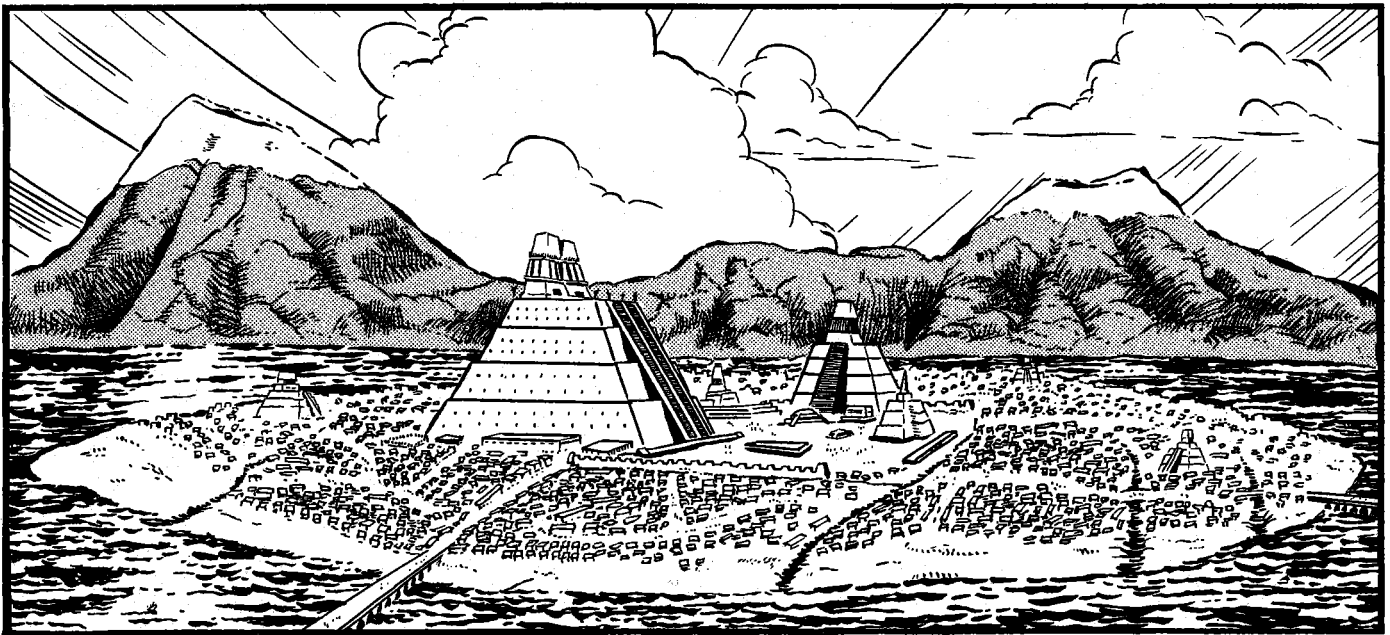
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INTRODUCTION

Many cultures lived and died in Mexico before the Spanish Conquest. *GURPS Aztecs* concentrates on the last one: the empire of Moctezuma II. Until 1519, this empire stretched from the Pacific to the Atlantic. Its capital city, Tenochtitlán, featured orderly canals, 10-story whitewashed pyramids and a zoo teeming with exotic animals.

This empire's people, who called themselves *Mexica*, believed everything and everyone had their place. The gods controlled nature and fate while men, according to their station, nourished the gods and kept society in harmony. Through sacrifices, they helped their gods maintain their orderly world.

The Aztec mind-set was very different from that of any European country, which was one reason the Spanish crushed them so thoroughly. Playing in an Aztec world with a modern "personality" can be diverting, but trying to see the Aztec world-view from the inside is a real roleplaying challenge. This book is an attempt to make that possible.

GURPS Aztecs lets players visit three parts of the Aztec's brilliant, violent history. Before the Conquest, merchants and warriors lived in a complex world of trade and intrigue, as part of a powerful empire constantly absorbing its neighbors. During the Conquest, warriors struggled desperately against the pale-faced conquistadors, neither side ever understanding the other. After the Conquest, PCs might fight on as guerrillas, while the Spanish settled in to exploit their new lands.

Like many works about the Aztecs, much of this book is based on the 12-volume *Florentine Codex*, written by the Spanish friar, Bernardino de Sahagún, who came to Mexico in 1525. With the help of native informants, he wrote about the conquered society in both Spanish and the native language.

— Aurelio Locsin III

Spelling and Pronunciation

The Aztec language is called Náhuatl, which means *beautiful language*. It lacks the letters *f*, *g*, and *r* and is pronounced like Spanish, except for *ll*, which is pronounced like the English letter *l*. Vowels are all short and other letters are pronounced, with these exceptions:

Q: pronounced *k* as in *quetzal* (KETzal).

C: pronounced *s* before *i* or *e* as in *maceuatl* (maSEwatl). Pronounced *k* before *a* or *o* as in *calli* (KAlI) or *calmecac* (kalMEkak).

CH: pronounced *tch* as in *telpochcalli* (telpotchKAlI).

HU: pronounced *w* as in *Huitzilopochtli* (witziloPOTCHtli).

X: pronounced *sh* as in *xóchtli* (SHOcheetl).

U: silent in *que* (KE) and *qui* (KEE). Pronounced as *w* or *oo* before other letters, as in *Tula* (TOOla).

TL, TZ, TS: each of these is pronounced as one sound that should not be separated, as in *coatl* (koAtl) or *Náhuatl* (NAwatl).

Accenting of Náhuatl words is not well understood; the best sources show no accents, or show them in an inconsistent manner. The best compromise is to accent the next to last syllable unless (as with a Spanish word) an accent shows otherwise, as with Tenochtitlán, which is accented on the last syllable.

Not even the *Florentine Codex* spelled Aztec words consistently. *GURPS Aztecs* chooses the simplest known spelling of a word and modernizes it when possible. For example, the singular *pochtecatl* (merchant) and plural *pochteca* becomes the singular *pochteca* and plural *pochtecas*. This does *not* follow Aztec usage, but is easy to understand. For information on the correct plural forms of Aztec words, see the *Glossary*, p. 125.

About GURPS

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Page References

Rules and statistics in this book are specifically for the *GURPS Basic Set*, Third Edition. Any page reference that begins with a B refers to a page in the *Basic Set* — e.g., p. B102 means p. 102 of the *Basic Set*, Third Edition. Page references beginning with M refer to *GURPS Magic*.

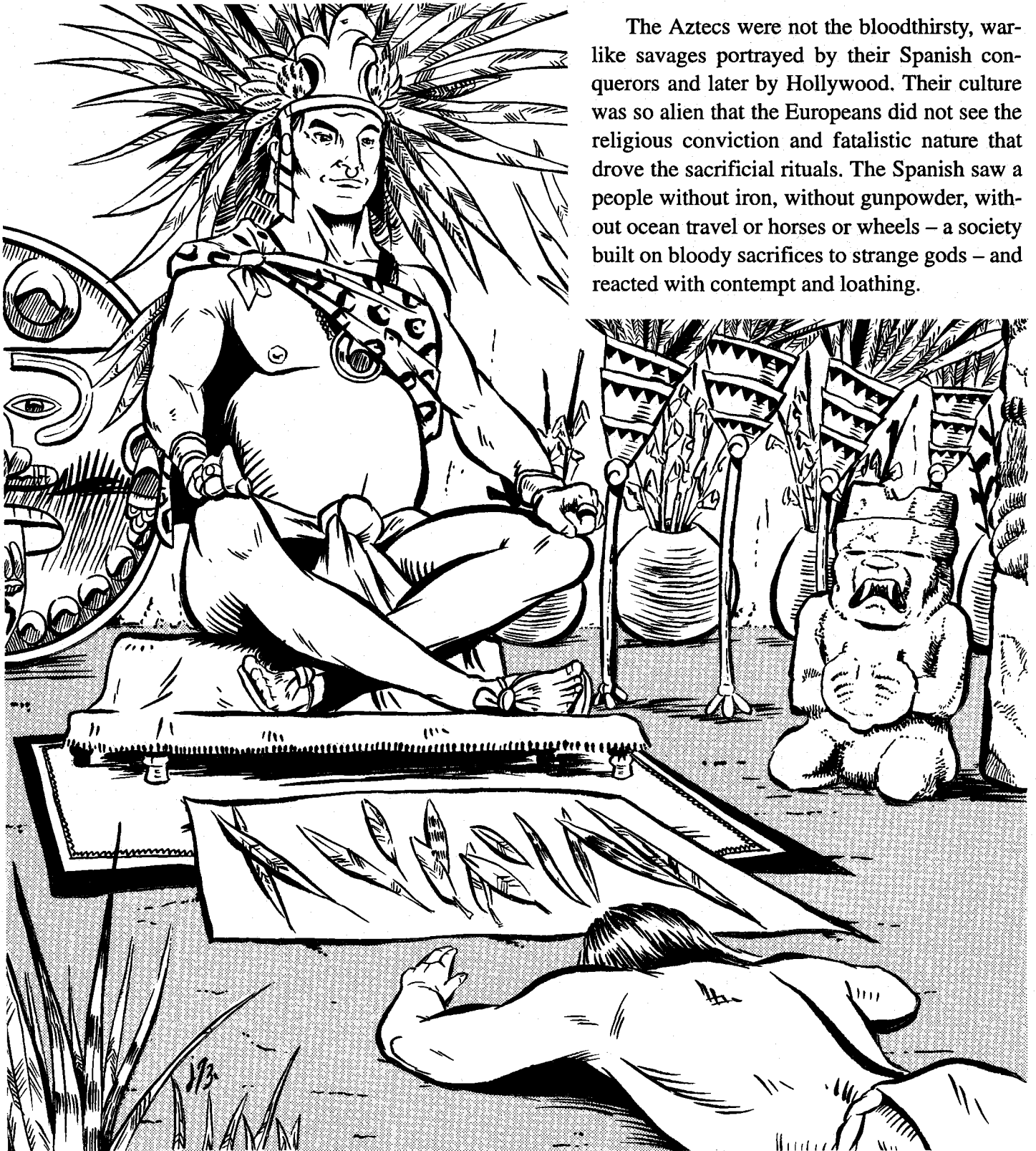


About the Author

In 1988, Aurelio Locsin discovered pre-Columbian ruins on a trip to Mexico and became hooked on the Aztec culture. He discovered roleplaying games much earlier, while still a high school junior in 1975. He now works as a freelance technical writer in Orange County, California, and occasionally writes nonfiction articles for magazines.

1 THE AZTEC WORLD

The Aztecs were not the bloodthirsty, war-like savages portrayed by their Spanish conquerors and later by Hollywood. Their culture was so alien that the Europeans did not see the religious conviction and fatalistic nature that drove the sacrificial rituals. The Spanish saw a people without iron, without gunpowder, without ocean travel or horses or wheels – a society built on bloody sacrifices to strange gods – and reacted with contempt and loathing.





But the sophisticated and organized Aztec society built clean and spacious cities, practiced arts using jewels, gold and feathers, and kept order through complex laws and customs. Only in the technologies of transport and war were they inferior to the invaders – but that was their undoing.

Geography

The world of the Aztecs occupied most of central and southern México. A chain of mountains ran down the center of this land, cupping the Aztec homelands in the Valley of México. The flat lands surrounding the mountains were mostly unfarmable grassland and desert. Stretches of low-lying jungle and forest covered the south, east, and the Yucatán.

Anahuac

The Aztecs knew México as *Anahuac*, a world floating in the middle of a limitless sea that merged into the sky. The varied terrain and climate of México can be divided into three zones.

The areas under 3,000 feet formed the hot lands or tropical lowlands, which produced cacao, vanilla, tobacco and cotton. From here too, came the exotic birds, feathers, jaguar skins and seashells used to produce luxury goods. The Aztecs detested the hot lands, preferring the cooler climates of their temperate lands. Averaging between 3,000 and 6,000 feet above sea level, these areas contained most of the Aztec cities and produced grains, wheat, barley and maize. The cold lands above 6,000 feet could not be farmed and were covered with forests of oak, pine, spruce and cedar. Snow permanently covered the highest peaks.

Valley of México

The Valley of México rose 7,000 feet from the lowlands; it ran 75 miles from north to south and 40 miles from east to west. Here lay the Aztec heartlands, with its most famous cities. Mountains ranging from 3,000 to 10,000 feet surrounded the area. The highest of these peaks included two volcanoes: Popocatépetl, at 17,880 feet, and Itzacihuatl, at 17,340 feet. Both lay perpetually under snow.

Lakes

Five lakes, all under 12 feet deep, nourished the valley. Lake Texcoco was the largest and lowest, receiving the runoff from lakes Xaltocan, Zumpango, Chalco

Popocatépetl

This beautiful mountain, usually snow-covered, is one of two which overlooks the Valley of México. Usually quiet, it began to spew smoke and fire just before the Conquest. Most interpreted this as an evil omen. The emperor may send adventurers to the summit to discover the meaning of its ominous behavior. Or during the Conquest, Cortés may send an expedition to gather sulfur for gunpowder.

Adventurers who dare to brave the volcano's slopes will discover its lower regions dense with forest. The trees thin out and then completely disappear at 13,000 feet.

Native climbers need to make a Will roll each time they hear the volcano rumble. If they fail, they abandon their journey out of fear. Each subsequent Will roll after the first adds +1, as the climbers become braver.

At around 12,000 feet, inexperienced climbers may develop altitude sickness. Roll against HT once per hour. Failure temporarily decreases HT by 1. Initial symptoms include loss of appetite, headaches, weakness and loss of interest in the climb. Climbers who continue will experience apathy, nausea and sleepiness. Resting one hour per 1,000 feet counters the symptoms (recover lost HT by 1 per hour of rest). Retreating to lower altitudes also quickly improves health (increase lost HT by 1 per 1,000 feet of descent).

On the way up, climbers have to contend with smoke, and depending on volcanic activity, hot ash and rolling boulders. At the summit is a 500-foot-deep crater with a diameter of 2,700 feet. Sulfur deposits cover the walls of the crater.

The Victim's Reaction

Not all victims approached their sacrificial end with grace and dignity. Many warriors tried to escape during the ceremonies. Others fainted just as they reached the top of the pyramid. Many victims, especially women, may have remained unaware of their impending sacrifice, especially if they were beheaded in one surprising move.

PCs who are lucky enough to reach the sacrificial altar need to make a Will roll three times: during the ceremonies preceding sacrifice, halfway up the temple steps and near the sacrificial block. Social Status of 4+ adds 1; the higher a person was on the social ladder, the more he was trained to see this as an honor. Warriors and priests also receive a +1 because they believe that this is a good way to die. Slaves get -1.

If this Will roll is failed, roll against HT. A failure means the victim faints and will be unconscious when sacrificed. Success means he tries to escape. For an Aztec, this is the ultimate shame, though prisoners from other cultures might feel differently!

Clerical Investment Costs

Clerical Investment costs 5 points in a historical Aztec background. There are added costs to be a priest in a historical/fantastic campaign, where magic works! Note that some of the spells listed here are found in *GURPS Magic* rather than the *Basic Set*.

By paying the base 5 points for Clerical Investment, *plus* the appropriate cost for the deity as listed in the sidebars on the following pages, a priest becomes able to learn and use that deity's spells (plus Recover Strength) as though he were a mage. The priest does not automatically get spells - he must study and pay character points for each one he wants to learn - but his temple provides training. A few deities provide extra benefits, which *are* automatic.

Transformations: Multiple Deities

Most Aztec priests or priestesses serve only one god. But there is an important exception. If a deity can change into another, a priest may invest in both the original deity and the transformation and receive powers from both gods. The devotee must meet the prerequisites of *both* deities.

For example, a priest wishes to serve both Tezcatlipoca and Mixcóatl, one of Tezcatlipoca's transformations. To meet the prerequisites for Tezcatlipoca, he must have any weapon skill at 15+, Shield at 15+, and Disguise at 15+. To meet the prerequisites for Mixcóatl, he must also have Animal Handling at 15+ and any one of these skills at 15+: Traps, Tracking, Bow, Blowpipe, Spear Thrower.

Continued on next page . . .

Human Sacrifice

Only male priests with many years of service sacrificed humans. They had to do it with no feeling, but with speed, skill and precision. Because the emperor was the highest priest in the land, he could also sacrifice people, but he did so only with important captives.

A small town might sacrifice 30 people in a year, while a provincial capital might offer 400. Sometimes thousands were sacrificed. During the dedication of the Great Temple in Tenochtitlán, nearly 20,000 victims nourished the gods.

Divine credit for the sacrifice went to the person offering the victim and never to the priest performing it, unless the priest also captured the victim. There were many methods of human sacrifice.

Drowning

Drowning was most often used on children as an offering to Tlaloc, the rain god. The victim was first beaten until it cried. This induced tears in the watchers; tears equated to the life-giving rain. With great ceremony, the child was then thrown into a body of water, where it drowned.

Beheading

Women who impersonated the female deities were usually beheaded. The victim was usually mildly drunk as she danced up the temple steps, accompanied by priests. When she reached the top, priests grabbed her and lopped off her head. Her blood, spurting in many directions, brought fertility to the crops. Her heart was also taken, sometimes before the beheading, but usually after.

Burning

Other victims were roasted alive in a fire as an offering to the fire god, Xiuhtecutli. They were given a drug called *yiautli* to anesthetize them. Then their limbs were bound and they were thrown into the flames. After a few minutes, the still-living victims were pulled out and their hearts taken.



TIME

The Aztec Calendar

Like many Mesoamerican cultures, the Aztecs inherited their sophisticated time measurements from the Maya. Some days were lucky, others unlucky. Each person's birthday, profession and chosen god also affected his day-to-day fortunes.

The rules in this section will encourage the characters to consult a soothsayer or render a sacrifice before any important event, just as the Aztecs used to do. The GM can decide whether to add some, all, or none of the effects, preferably in this order of importance: secular calendar, sacred calendar and daily time.

Daily Time

Each day had 22 hours: thirteen for the day and nine for the night. Each hour was ruled by a different god. Some brought good luck, some brought bad. The blare of conch trumpets, sounded by priests from the tops of temples, announced the time.

At the GM's option, all activities occurring during each hour receive its specified modifier, which is added to that *day's* sacred calendar modifier (described on pp. 81-84). When time becomes important to an adventure, the players may tell the GM "We will start this work at the sixth hour." Or the GM may tell them at an appropriate time, "You hear the sound of the trumpet; it is now the hour of Tlaloc!"

The tables below give a starting time for each Aztec hour, making each one a modern hour long except for two of the night-time hours. These are *entirely arbitrary*, invented for game use, since the details of the Aztec hours have been lost.

The 13 Lords of the Day

The Aztecs favored the day for most of their activities because the life-giving sun shone. It provided strength to the warriors and energy for children. An Aztec working day began at sunrise and ended at sunset.

These gods ruled the hours of the day:

1. Xiutecutli, +1	6 A.M.
2. Tlatecutli, 0	7 A.M.
3. Chalchiuhtlicue, 0	8 A.M.
4. Tonatiuh, +1	9 A.M.
5. Tlazolteotl, -1	10 A.M.
6. Mictlantecutli, -1	11 A.M.
7. Centeotl, 0	12 noon
8. Tlaloc, 0	1 P.M.
9. Quetzalcoatl, +1	2 P.M.
10. Tezcatlipoca, -1	3 P.M.
11. Chalmecatecutli, 0	4 P.M.
12. Tlauizcalpantecutli (Great Star), +1	5 P.M.
13. Citlalicue, 0	6 P.M.

The Nine Lords of the Night

Night was a fearful time and most people went to bed early to avoid the ghosts that lurked in the darkness. A few brave souls ventured out, however. Refuse collectors gathered the pots of human excrement and urine from each home using a boat. They distributed the excrement to farmers for fertilizing the soil and the

"Calendar Stone"

This famous sculpture was not a calendar at all, but a platform for human sacrifice, 12 feet across, carved during the reign of Axayacatl in 1479 (the Aztec year 13 Reed). It was discovered in 1790 in the remains of the Temple District. The glyphs carved onto this 24-ton basalt platform represented the history of the Aztecs rather than a keeping of any calendar.

Tonatiuh, the sun god, is at the center of the stone. His tongue is a sacrificial knife and flanking his head are two claws holding human hearts. Around him, four panels represent the previous four eons: proceeding clockwise from the upper left, they are rain, jaguars, water and fire. The fifth eon, movement, is represented by the triangular cap over Tonatiuh.

The first ring of figures around the center represents the sacred calendar, beginning with 1 Crocodile and continuing counterclockwise. Two snakes form the outermost ring with their heads meeting at the bottom and their tails ending at the stone's creation date.



Aztec Monsters

These monsters primarily live in the Valley of México.

Acóatl

ST: 24
DX: 13
IQ: 5

Move/Dodge: 8 Size: 1 hex
PD/DR: 0 Weight: 50 lbs.
Damage: 1d crushing.

Victim also suffocates if the animal is successful in plugging up his nose.

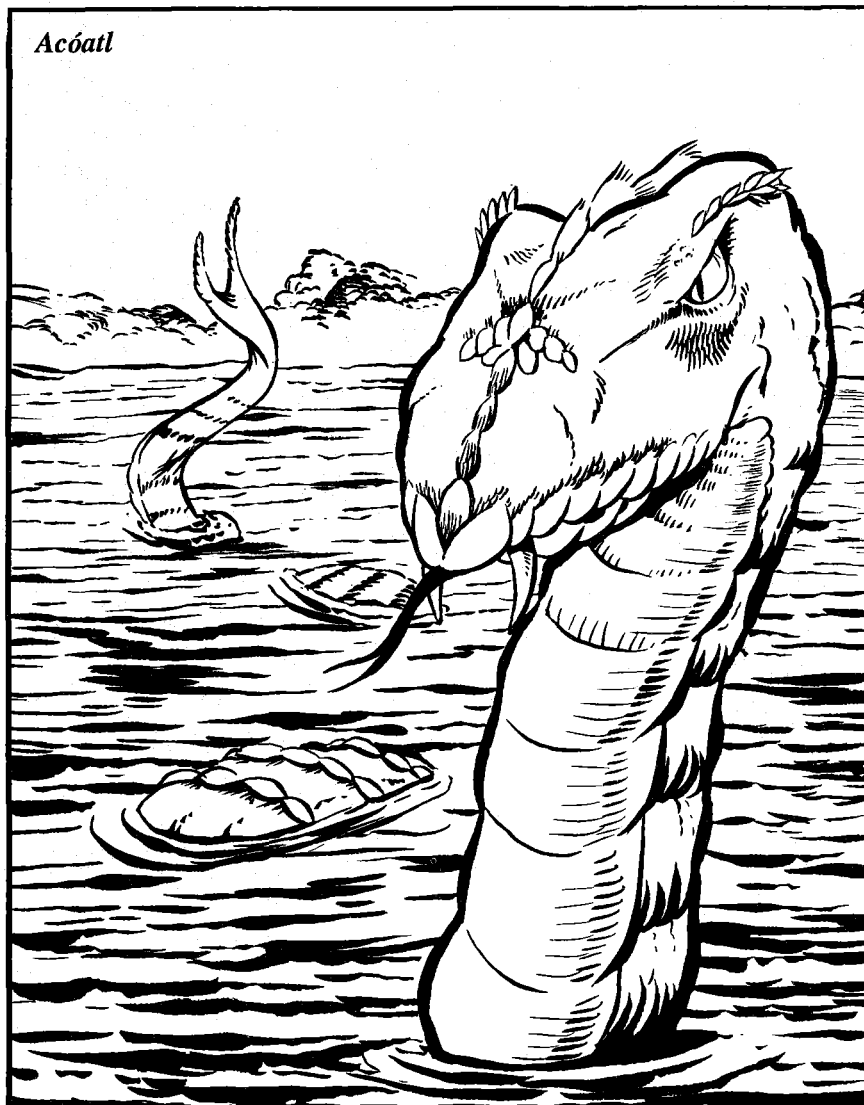
See p. B91.

HT: 15/15-30

Reach: C

The *acóatl* was a long, thick snake with a big head, fiery eyes and a forked tail. It typically dug a small pit near the water's edge, filled it with fish and then hid in the water. When someone came to gather the fish, the monster shot out and wrapped its long body around him. It inserted its forked tail into the victim's nostrils and squeezed him until he suffocated. Like many snakes, the *acóatl* swallowed its meals whole.

If the victim fled out of reach, this snake shot a venomous stream (range 6 hexes) that stunned its target as per p. B99; a HT roll is necessary to avoid the stunning effect. Then the *acóatl* dragged the victim into the water to drown.



Aúitzotl

ST: 20
DX: 14
IQ: 5
HT: 13/5

Move/Dodge: 10/7 Size: 1 hex
PD/DR: 0 Weight: 100 lbs.
Damage: 1d-4
Reach: C

This catlike animal lived near water, typically in caverns. The *Aúitzotl* baited its human victims in many ways. It could drive schools of fish to the surface, cry like a baby, or stir the water into foamy waves. These unusual events usually drew a passerby to investigate.

When the victim came too close to the water, the *Aúitzotl* pulled the victim into the water with its humanlike hands. After the prey had drowned, his eyes, teeth and nails disappeared down the animal's throat. Often, the victim's skin remained unblemished.

Because Tlaloc sometimes commanded this animal to summon people to Tlalocan, the *Aúitzotl* became an omen of death.

Mazamitli

ST: 5-14
DX: 15
IQ: 4
HT: 13/6-8

Move/Dodge: 9/7 Size: 1 hex
PD/DR: 0 Weight: 100 lbs.
Damage: (clawing and biting) 2d-2
Reach: C

This animal was about the size and shape of a small deer and typically hid in a herd of deer, which apparently couldn't recognize it. When hungry, this predator revealed hooked claws to seize unsuspecting prey – sometimes a deer, sometimes a hunter! It then opened its thick jaws and used its fangs to rip its catch from neck to belly, scattering entrails with its claws. The *mazamitli* then feasted on the remains.

Ghosts

Ghosts often appeared to reveal both good and bad information and are thus useful for revealing GM hints to straying adventurers. Some ghosts appeared to ask family members to behave better.

Ghosts also arrived as punishments from the gods. In such cases, they appeared as insects who fastened on the body to suck the blood and the soul away from the victim. They also appeared as the happy souls of dead relatives in the form of butterflies, to reassure everyone that all was well.

One common ghost, even in modern times, is the Weeping Woman. She appears dressed in white, with long, flowing hair, moaning loudly and fearfully. Her usual cry, "Alas, my children," forewarns death, danger, or misfortune.

Ciuateteo

Though most ghosts were harmless, the *Ciuateteo* (Little Princesses) were vengeful goddesses who used to be women who died in childbirth. They particularly hated children and attractive men. They might appear at any time, but on the day 1 Monkey they descended to Anahuac in swarms, making this a bad day for the young and the handsome!

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- Adams, Richard E.W., *Prehistoric Mesoamerica*, University of Oklahoma Press, 1977. Describes the cultures, cities and archaeology before and during the time of the Aztecs, with many photographs and maps.
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- Heyden, Doris & Gendrop, Paul, *Pre-Columbian Architecture of Mesoamerica*, Electa, 1988. Illustrates with maps, drawings and photographs all the known ruins of México, and is especially useful for exploration adventures.
- Suárez, Jorge A., *Mesoamerican Indian Languages*, Cambridge University Press, 1983. A brief study on the spread, grammar and vocabulary of the Mesoamerican languages.
- Weaver, Muriel Porter, *The Aztecs, Maya, and Their Predecessors*, Academic Press, 1981. Basic college textbook on Mesoamerica.
- Whitlock, Ralph, *Everyday Life of the Maya*, Dorset Press, 1976. An introduction to the Mayans.

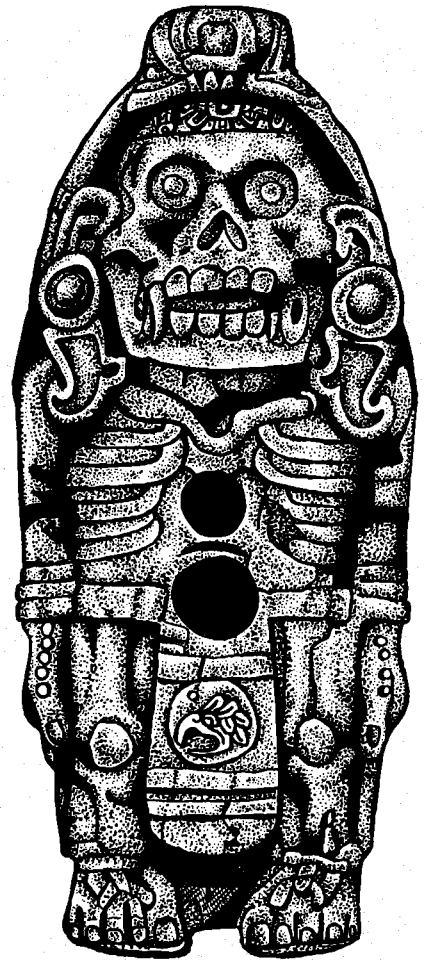


Spain

- Elliot, J.H., *Spain and Its World: 1500-1700*, Yale University Press, 1989. Collects several essays on such topics as how the 16th-century conquistador thought, how American and Spanish culture changed each other, and how the Spanish Empire was managed administratively and economically.
- Kamen, Henry, *Spain: 1469-1714*, Longman, 1991. Describes the government, empire and economics of the European nation.

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- Jennings, Gary, *Aztec*, Avon, 1980. A grand epic about the Aztecs. This thick book follows the life of Mixtli, who manages to hold many different Aztec jobs including *pochteca* and warrior, from birth to just after the Spanish Conquest.
- Mitchell, Kirk, *New Barbarians*, Ace Science Fiction Books, 1986. Rome never fell . . . and as the Roman empire explores the New World, it collides with the Aztecs.
- Silverberg, Robert, *Beyond the Gate of Worlds*, Tor Books, 1991. In this parallel world, the Black Death kills off far more of Europe than in our own world. Because of lack of resources and people, Europe never embarks on the Age of Exploration. Consequently, the Aztec empire, along with many others, flourishes.



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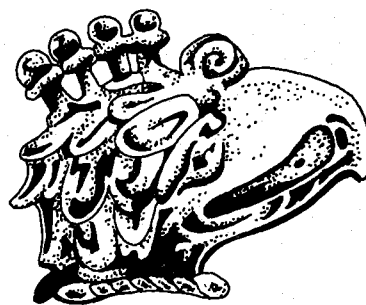
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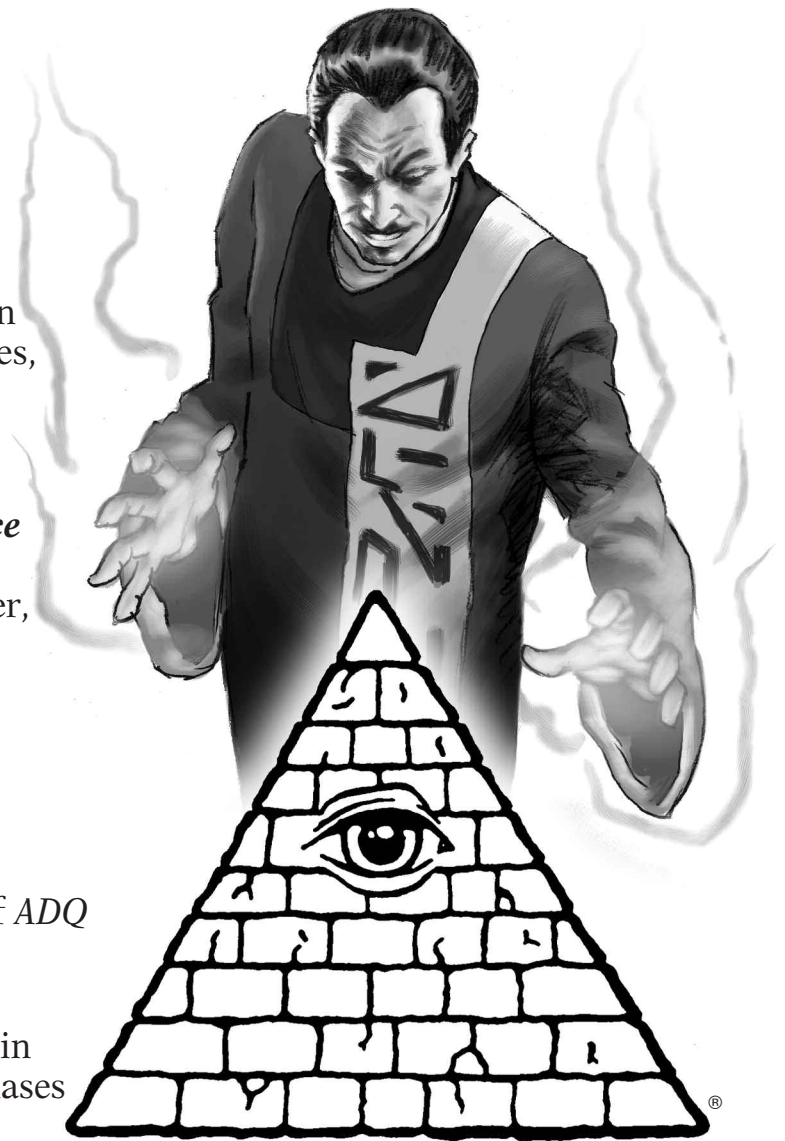
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