



Aztec

By Gary Jennings

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Gary Jennings's *Aztec* is the extraordinary story of the last and greatest native civilization of North America. Told in the words of one of the most robust and memorable characters in modern fiction, Mixtli-Dark Cloud, *Aztec* reveals the very depths of Aztec civilization from the peak and feather-banner splendor of the Aztec Capital of Tenochtitlan to the arrival of Hernán Cortás and his conquistadores, and their destruction of the Aztec empire. The story of Mixtli is the story of the Aztecs themselves---a compelling, epic tale of heroic dignity and a colossal civilization's rise and fall.

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Editorial Review

Review

“A dazzling and hypnotic historical novel.” ?*The New York Times*

“Anyone who reads, anyone who still lusts for adventure or that book you can't put down, will glory in *Aztec*.” ?*Los Angeles Times*

About the Author

Gary Jennings was known for the rigorous and intensive research behind his books, which often included hazardous travel?exploring every corner of Mexico for his Aztec novels, retracing the numerous wanderings of Marco Polo for *The Journeymen*, joining nine different circuses for *Spangle*, and roaming the Balkans for *Raptor*. Born in Buena Vista, Virginia in 1928, Jennings passed away in 1999 in Pompton Lakes, New Jersey, leaving behind a rich legacy of historical fiction and outlines for new novels.

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DIXIT:

MY LORD

Pardon me, my lord, that I do not know your formal and fitting honorific, but I trust I do not hazard my lord's taking offense. You are a man, and not one man of all the men I have met in my life has ever resented being addressed as a lord. So, my lord

* * *

Your Excellency, is it?

Ayyo, even more illustrious—what we of these lands would call an ahuaquáhuil, a tree of great shade. Your Excellency it shall be, then. It impresses me the more that a personage of such eminent excellency should have summoned such a one as myself to speak words in Your Excellency's presence.

Ah, no, Your Excellency, do not demur if I appear to flatter Your Excellency. Common report throughout the city, and these your servitors here, have made plain to me how august a man you are, Your Excellency, while I am but a threadbare rag, a frayed raveling of what once was. Your Excellency is attired and arrayed and assured in your conspicuous excellency, and I am only I. But Your Excellency wishes to hear of what I was. This has also been explained to me. Your Excellency desires to learn what my people, this land, our lives were like in the years, in the sheaves of years before it pleased Your Excellency's king and his crossbearers and crossbowmen to deliver us from our bondage of barbarism.

That is correct? Then Your Excellency asks no easy thing of me. How, in this little room, out of my little intellect, in the little time the gods—the Lord God—may have vouchsafed me to finish my roads and my days, how can I evoke the vastness of what was our world, the variety of its peoples, the events of the sheaves upon sheaves of years?

Think, imagine, picture yourself, Your Excellency, as that tree of great shade. See in your mind its immensity, its mighty boughs and the birds among them, the lush foliage, the sunlight upon it, the coolness it casts upon a house, a family, the girl and boy who were my sister and myself. Could Your

Excellency compress that tree of great shade back into the acorn which Your Excellency's father once thrust between your mother's legs?

Yya ayya, I have displeased Your Excellency and dismayed your scribes. Forgive me, Your Excellency. I should have guessed that the white men's private copulation with their white women must be different—of more delicacy—than I have seen them perform forcibly upon our women in public. And assuredly the Christian copulation that produced Your Excellency must have been even more

* * *

Yes, yes, Your Excellency, I desist.

But Your Excellency perceives my difficulty. How to enable Your Excellency to see at a glance the difference between our inferior *then* and your superior *now*? *Perhaps one summary illustration will suffice, and you need trouble yourself with no more listening.*

Look, Your Excellency, at your scribes: in our language “the word knowers.” I have been a scribe myself, and I well recall how hard it was to render onto fawnskin or fiber paper or bark paper so much as the unfleshed bones of historical dates and happenings, with any degree of accuracy. Sometimes it was hard even for me to read my own pictures aloud, without stumbling, after just the few moments the colors took to dry.

But your word knowers and I have been practicing, while awaiting Your Excellency's arrival, and I am amazed, I am struck with wonder, at what any one of your reverend scribes can do. He can write and read back to me not just the substance of what I speak, but every single word, and with all the intonations and pauses and stresses of my speech. I would think it a talent of memory and mimicry—we had our word *rememberers*, too—but *he tells me, shows me, proves to me, that it is all there on his page of paper. I congratulate myself, Your Excellency, that I have learned to speak your language with what proficiency my poor brain and tongue can attain, but your writing would be beyond me.*

In our picture writing, the very colors spoke, the colors sang or wept, the colors were necessary. They were many: magentared, ocher-gold, ahúacatl-green, turquoise-blue, chocélatl, the red-yellow of the jacinth gem, clay-gray, midnight-black. And even then they were inadequate to catch every individual word, not to mention nuances and adroit turns of phrase. Yet any one of your word knowers can do just that: record every syllable forever, with a single quill instead of a handful of reeds and brushes. And, most marvelous, *with just one color, the rusty black decoction they tell me is ink.*

Very well, Your Excellency, there you have it in an acorn—the difference between us *Indians* and you *white men*, between our ignorance and your knowledge, between our old times and your new day. Will it satisfy Your Excellency that the mere stroke of a quill has demonstrated your people's right to rule and our people's fate to be ruled? Surely this is all that Your Excellency requires from us *Indians*: a confirmation that the victor's conquest is ordained, not by his arms and artifice, not even by his Almighty God, but by his innate superiority of nature over lesser beings like ourselves. Your Excellency can have no further need of me or words of mine.

My wife is old and infirm and unattended. I cannot pretend that she grieves at my absence from her side, but it annoys her. Ailing and irascible as she is, her annoyance is not good for her. Nor for me. Therefore, with sincere thanks to Your Excellency for Your Excellency's gracious reception of this aged wretch, I bid you

My apologies, Your Excellency. As you remark, I have not Your Excellency's permission to depart at whim. I am at Your Excellency's service for as long as

* * *

Again my apologies. I was not aware that I had repeated “Your Excellency” more than thirty times in this brief colloquy, nor that I had said it in any special tone of voice. But I cannot contradict your scribes' scrupulous account. Henceforth I will endeavor to temper my reverence and enthusiasm for your honorific, Señor Bishop, and to keep my tone of voice irreproachable. And, as you command, I will continue.

* * *

But now, what am I to say? What should I cause your ears to hear?

My life has been long, as ours is measured. I did not die in infancy, as so many of our children do. I did not die in battle or in holy sacrifice, as so many have willingly done. I did not succumb to an excess of drinking, or to the attack of a wild beast, or to the creeping decay of The Being Eaten by the Gods. I did not die by contracting one of the dread diseases that came with your ships, and of which so many thousands upon thousands have perished. I have outlived even the gods, who forever had been deathless and who forever would be immortal. I have survived for more than a full sheaf of years, to see and do and learn and remember much. But no man can know everything of even his own time, and this land's life began immeasurably long ages before my own. It is only of my own that I can speak, only my own mat I can bring back to shadow life in your rusty black ink....

“There was a splendor of spears, a splendor of spears!”

An old man of our island of Xaltócan used always to begin his battle tales that way. We listeners were captivated on the instant, and we remained engrossed, though it might have been a most minor battle he described and, once he had told the foregoing events and the outcome of it all, perhaps a very trivial tale hardly worth the telling. But he had the knack for blurting at once the most compelling highlight of a narrative, and then weaving backward and forward from it. Unlike him, I can but begin at the beginning and move onward through time just as I

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Joanne Hall:

The book Aztec can give more knowledge and also the precise product information about everything you want. So just why must we leave the great thing like a book Aztec? Several of you have a different opinion about reserve. But one aim that book can give many info for us. It is absolutely suitable. Right now, try to closer along with your book. Knowledge or details that you take for that, you can give for each other; you could share all of these. Book Aztec has simple shape however, you know: it has great and big function for you. You can look the enormous world by wide open and read a book. So it is very wonderful.

Joyce Morgan:

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Adam Perlman:

Reading can called imagination hangout, why? Because if you find yourself reading a book especially book entitled Aztec your thoughts will drift away trough every dimension, wandering in each and every aspect that maybe mysterious for but surely can be your mind friends. Imaging just about every word written in a book

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