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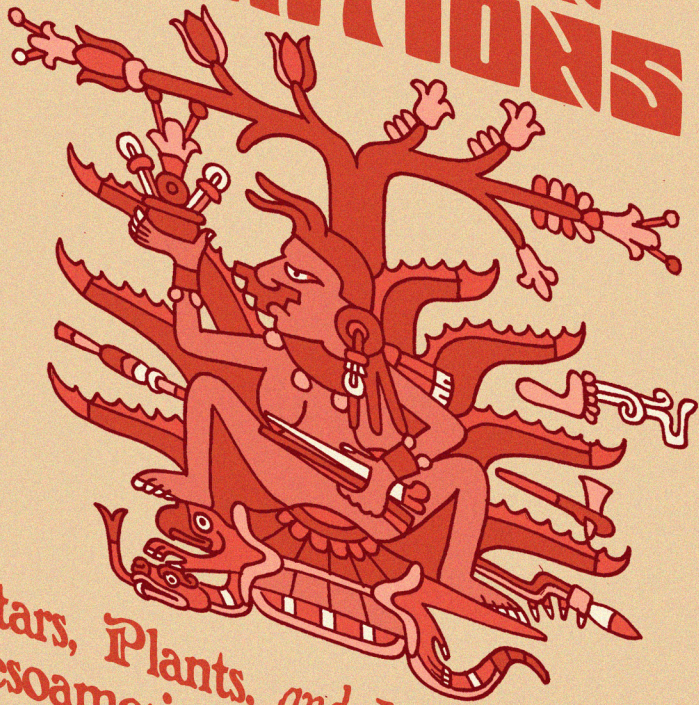
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ALL OUR RELATIONS



Stars, Plants, and Mothers in the
Mesoamerican Story of Mayahuel

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BOBCAT COMICS
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, MERCED
CENTER FOR THE HUMANITIES, 2023

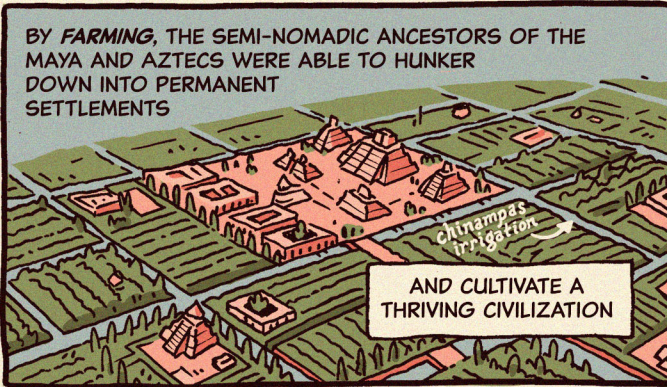
Image adapted from Codex Mictlan p.9

9000 YEARS AGO...

...HALF A WORLD AWAY FROM THE FERTILE CRESCENT OF THE MIDDLE-EAST, MESOAMERICA WAS UNDERGOING AN AGRICULTURAL REVOLUTION OF ITS OWN.



BY FARMING, THE SEMI-NOMADIC ANCESTORS OF THE MAYA AND AZTECS WERE ABLE TO HUNKER DOWN INTO PERMANENT SETTLEMENTS

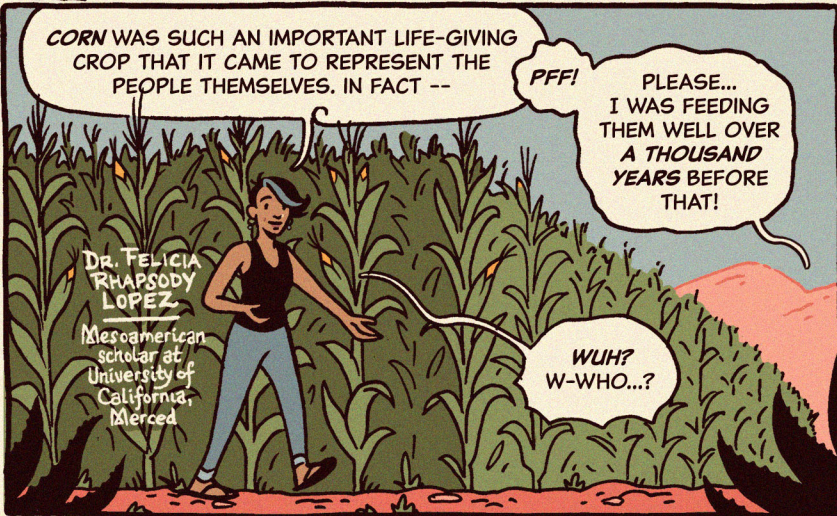


AND CULTIVATE A THRIVING CIVILIZATION

FUELED BY A RELIABLE AND PLENTIFUL FOOD SOURCE:



CORN WAS SUCH AN IMPORTANT LIFE-GIVING CROP THAT IT CAME TO REPRESENT THE PEOPLE THEMSELVES. IN FACT --



DR. FELICIA RHAPSODY LOPEZ

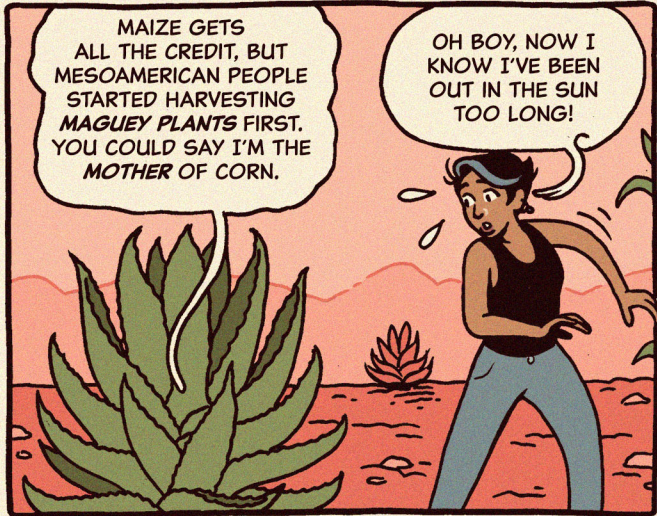
Mesoamerican scholar at University of California, Merced

PFF!

PLEASE... I WAS FEEDING THEM WELL OVER A THOUSAND YEARS BEFORE THAT!

WUH? W-WHO...?

MAIZE GETS ALL THE CREDIT, BUT MESOAMERICAN PEOPLE STARTED HARVESTING MAGUEY PLANTS FIRST. YOU COULD SAY I'M THE MOTHER OF CORN.



OH BOY, NOW I KNOW I'VE BEEN OUT IN THE SUN TOO LONG!

HERE, THIS'LL MAKE YOU FEEL BETTER.

MAGUEY - OR THE AGAVE PLANT - CAN BE USED FOR ANYTHING AND EVERYTHING. FOOD, SWEET SYRUP, MEDICINE, TOOLS, WEAPONS, BUILDING SUPPLIES, PAPER, TEXTILES - YOU NAME IT. BOOZY AND REFRESHING DRINKS TOO.

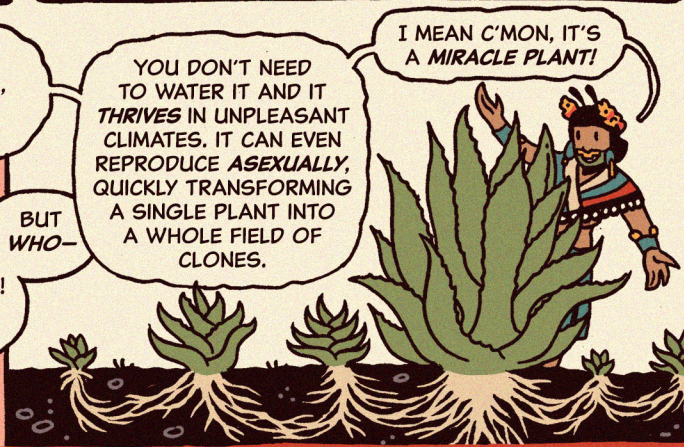
GOOD RIGHT?

BUT WHO--

DELICIOUS! ALMOST LIKE MILK...

YOU DON'T NEED TO WATER IT AND IT THRIVES IN UNPLEASANT CLIMATES. IT CAN EVEN REPRODUCE ASEXUALLY, QUICKLY TRANSFORMING A SINGLE PLANT INTO A WHOLE FIELD OF CLONES.

I MEAN C'MON, IT'S A MIRACLE PLANT!



I GUESS THAT'S WHY THEY CALLED ME THE WOMAN WITH 400 BREASTS --

NOW DON'T GET ALL WEIRD! I KNOW WHAT YOU WESTERNERS ARE LIKE.

THE NAHUATL WORD FOR 400 JUST MEANS "LOTS", BECAUSE I'M ABLE TO NURTURE AN ENTIRE CIVILIZATION, OKAY? TWO AIN'T GONNA CUT IT!

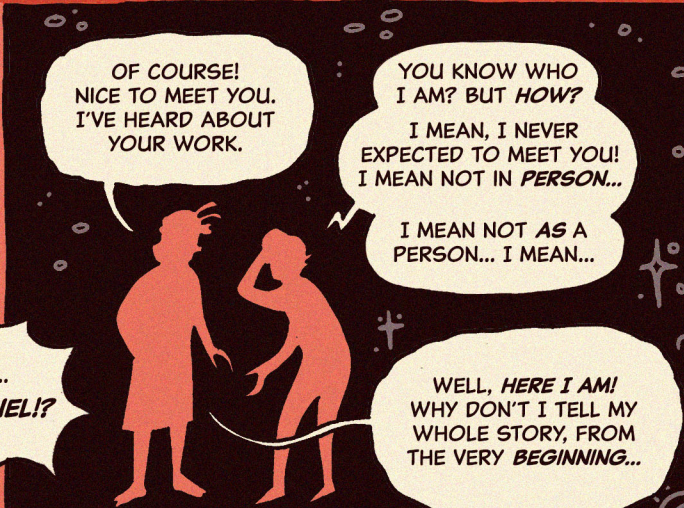
OF COURSE! NICE TO MEET YOU. I'VE HEARD ABOUT YOUR WORK.

YOU KNOW WHO I AM? BUT HOW? I MEAN, I NEVER EXPECTED TO MEET YOU! I MEAN NOT IN PERSON...

I MEAN NOT AS A PERSON... I MEAN...

WAIT... MAYAHUEL!?

WELL, HERE I AM! WHY DON'T I TELL MY WHOLE STORY, FROM THE VERY BEGINNING...





THE FIRST HUMAN WAS CREATED IN A CAVE BY THE "TEOTLS" - GOD-LIKE BEINGS, Y' MIGHT SAY. BUT WE'LL COME BACK TO THAT.

YES I THINK WE'VE OUTDONE OURSELVES THIS TIME.

LET'S DO SOMETHING TO KEEP THEM HAPPY.

NOT A BAD BIT OF CRAFTSMANSHIP THERE, IF I DO SAY SO MYSELF.

DON'T WANT THEM GETTING BORED DOWN THERE.



HMM.

IF WE COULD MAKE THEM A DRINK TO HELP LIVEN THEM UP A BIT, THAT OUGHTA DO THE TRICK.

THAT WAS QUETZALCOATL. THIS GUY GOT AROUND. AZTECS, MAYA, MIXTECS, ZAPOTECOS - THEY ALL KNEW ABOUT HIM AND INCORPORATED HIM INTO THEIR BELIEF SYSTEMS. A REAL BIG DEAL.

ANYWAY! WHEN YOU'RE ON THE HUNT FOR THE NEXT BIG THING TO BRING JOY TO HUMANITY, WHO BETTER TO COME TO THAN YOURS TRULY, RIGHT?



KINDA DREAMY TOO...

BACK THEN, I USED TO LIVE UP IN THE NIGHT SKY WITH MY GRANDMA AND THE REST OF THE TZITZIMIMEH - THE RAYS OF STARLIGHT.

Codex Yohualli Ehecatl p.18

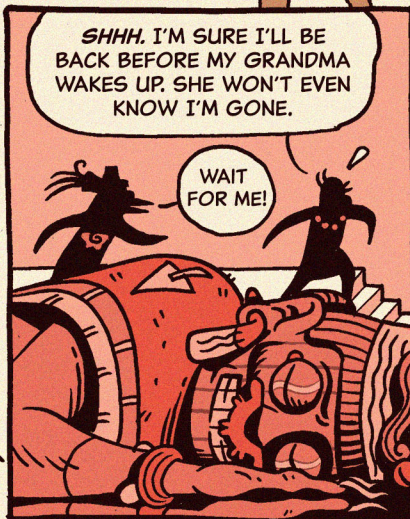


PSST! MAYAHUEL.

HM... QUETZ? W-WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?

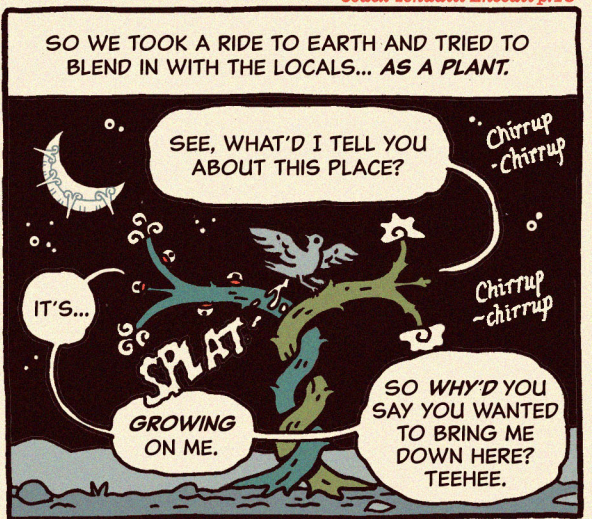
COME DOWN TO EARTH WITH ME. I'M TRYING T--

OKAY!



SHHH. I'M SURE I'LL BE BACK BEFORE MY GRANDMA WAKES UP. SHE WON'T EVEN KNOW I'M GONE.

WAIT FOR ME!



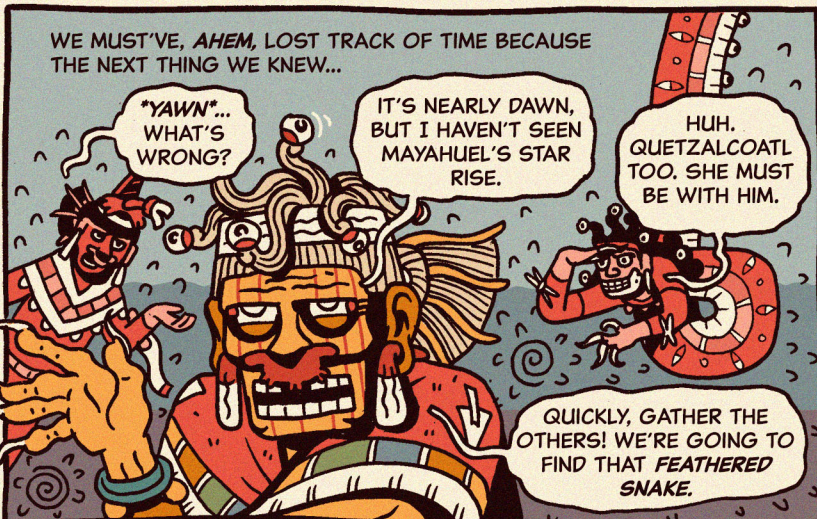
SO WE TOOK A RIDE TO EARTH AND TRIED TO BLEND IN WITH THE LOCALS... AS A PLANT.

SEE, WHAT'D I TELL YOU ABOUT THIS PLACE?

IT'S...

GROWING ON ME.

SO WHY'D YOU SAY YOU WANTED TO BRING ME DOWN HERE? TEEHEE.



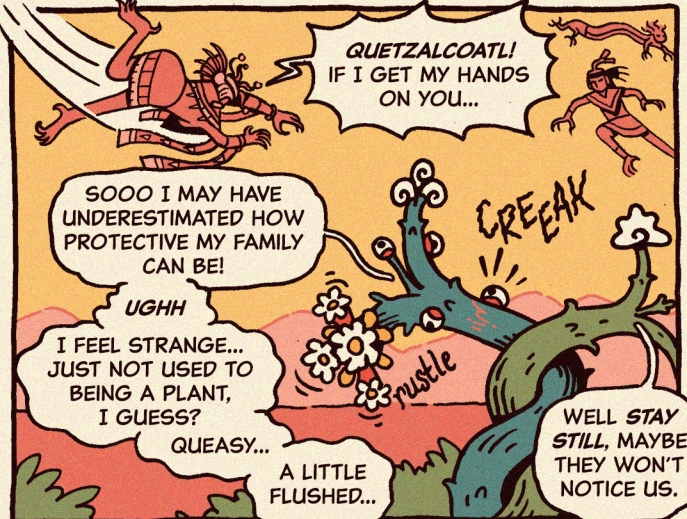
WE MUST'VE, AHM, LOST TRACK OF TIME BECAUSE THE NEXT THING WE KNEW...

YAWN... WHAT'S WRONG?

IT'S NEARLY DAWN, BUT I HAVEN'T SEEN MAYAHUEL'S STAR RISE.

HUH. QUETZALCOATL TOO. SHE MUST BE WITH HIM.

QUICKLY, GATHER THE OTHERS! WE'RE GOING TO FIND THAT FEATHERED SNAKE.



QUETZALCOATL! IF I GET MY HANDS ON YOU...

SOOO I MAY HAVE UNDERESTIMATED HOW PROTECTIVE MY FAMILY CAN BE!

UGHH

I FEEL STRANGE... JUST NOT USED TO BEING A PLANT, I GUESS?

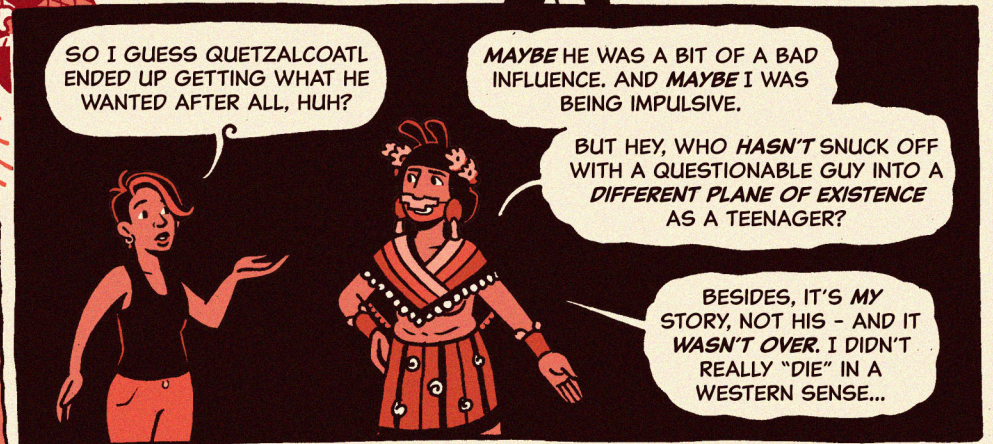
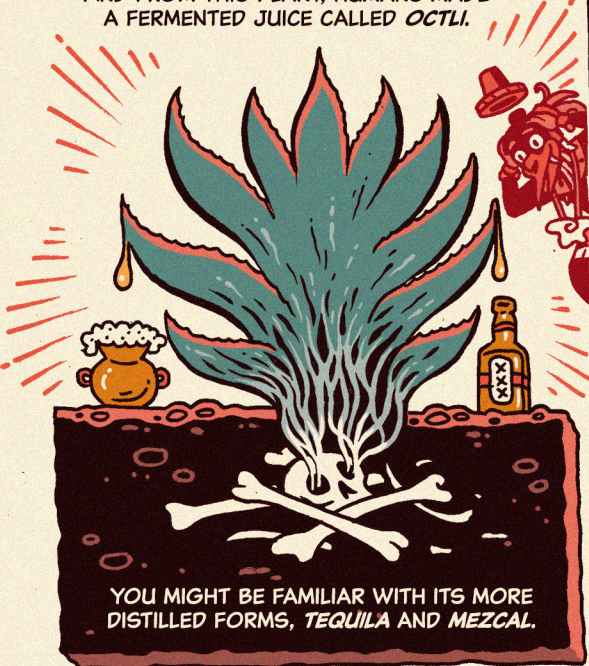
QUEASY...

A LITTLE FLUSHED...

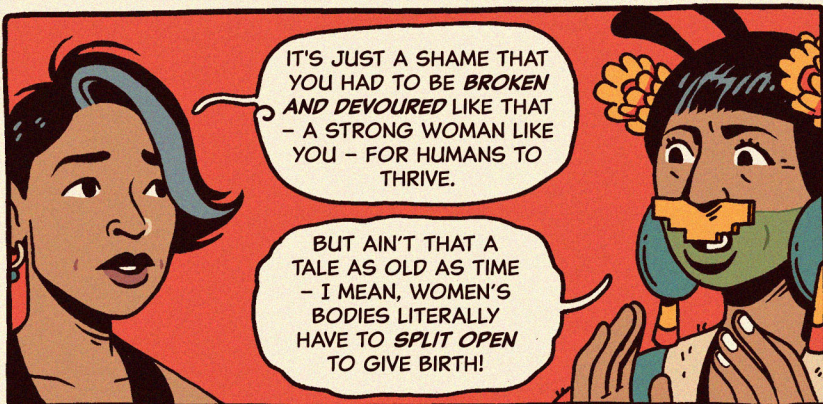
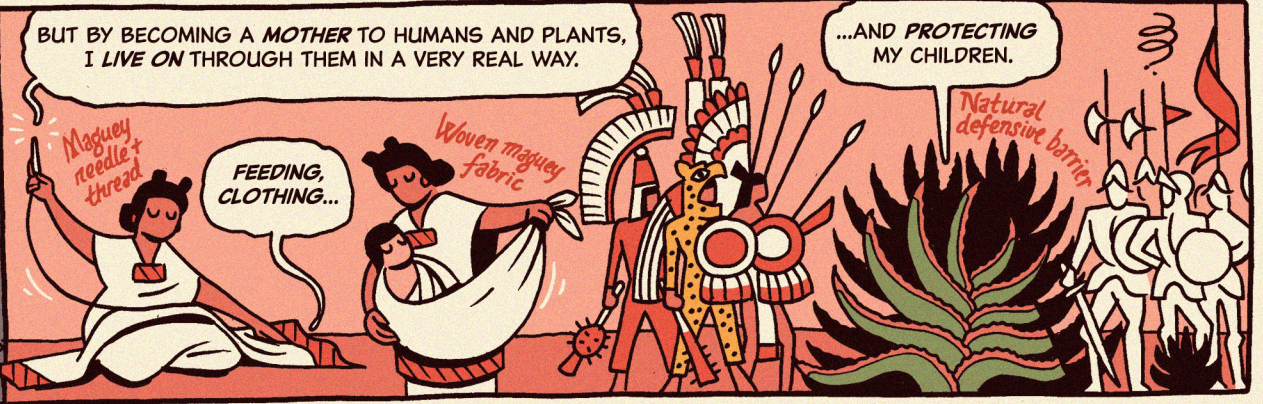
WELL STAY STILL, MAYBE THEY WON'T NOTICE US.



BUT LO AND BEHOLD, FROM MY REMAINS SPROUTED THE **FIRST MAGUEY PLANT**. AND FROM THIS PLANT, HUMANS MADE A FERMENTED JUICE CALLED **OCTLI**.



...I TRANSFORMED INTO SOMETHING MUCH MORE MEANINGFUL TO HUMANITY!
I WASN'T DOING MUCH GOOD FOR PEOPLE UP IN THE SKY.



...AND THAT PROCESS IS AN ONGOING SAGA. MANY INDIGENOUS PEOPLE LIVING IN MEXICO TODAY STILL RELY ON MAGUEY. I'M STILL HELPING PEOPLE...



BUT I CAN ALSO BE HARSH AND FIERCE. THEY DON'T CALL ME MOTHER FOR NOTHING!

IF MY KIDS DON'T RESPECT ME, THEY'LL HAVE TO FACE THE CONSEQUENCES.

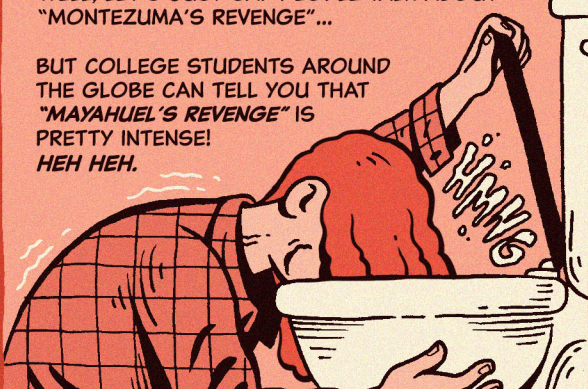
THAT'S WHY MESOAMERICANS RESERVED FERMENTED OCTLI FOR SPECIAL OCCASIONS. DRUNKENNESS WAS PUNISHED.



EXCEPT FOR THE ELDERLY... THEY'D EARNED A GOOD UNWIND!

IT WAS THE COLONIZERS' IDEA TO DISTILL ME. WELL, LET'S JUST SAY PEOPLE TALK ABOUT "MONTEZUMA'S REVENGE"...

BUT COLLEGE STUDENTS AROUND THE GLOBE CAN TELL YOU THAT "MAYAHUEL'S REVENGE" IS PRETTY INTENSE! HEH HEH.



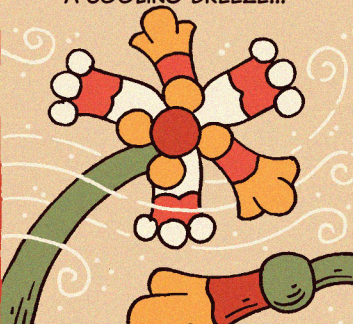
Y'SEE, THE SAME TEOTL CAN HAVE A CONSTELLATION OF DIFFERENT EFFECTS. CONSIDER THE WIND...



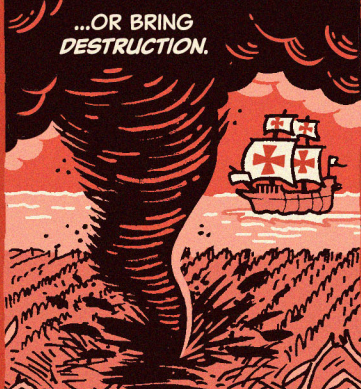
Quetzalcoatl Wind Mask

EHECATL Wind Teotl

...WHICH CAN FERTILIZE IMPORTANT CROPS AS A COOLING BREEZE...



...OR BRING DESTRUCTION.



WE MESOAMERICAN "DEITIES" ARE A COMPLICATED BUNCH - WE'RE NEVER ENTIRELY ONE THING OR THE OTHER.




MY STORY IS ALSO A GOOD EXAMPLE OF HOW A SINGLE TEOTL CAN HAVE MULTIPLE FORMS.

SOME ACCOUNTS SAY I WAS A HISTORICAL, FLESH-AND-BLOOD PERSON WHO FIRST DISCOVERED THE PLANT AND HOW TO USE IT.

OTHER NARRATIVES SAY I AM THE PLANT.

OR A DIVINE CREATOR.



IT DOESN'T MATTER... IT'S ALL... ME!

Codex Yohualli Ehecatl p.68

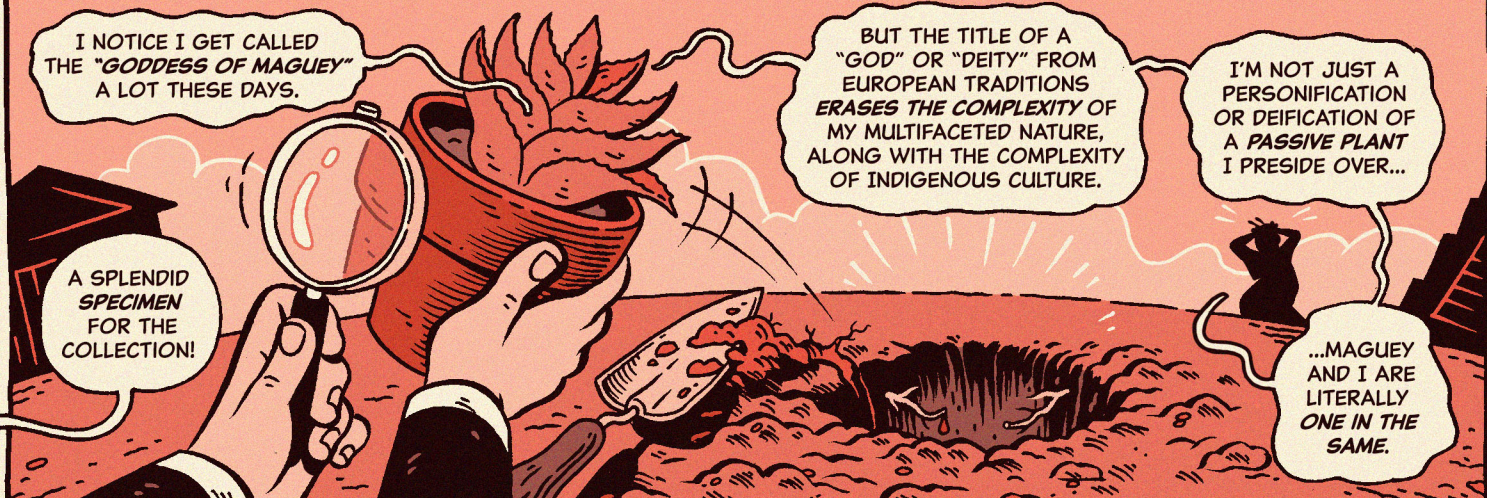
I NOTICE I GET CALLED THE "GODDESS OF MAGUEY" A LOT THESE DAYS.

A SPLENDID SPECIMEN FOR THE COLLECTION!

BUT THE TITLE OF A "GOD" OR "DEITY" FROM EUROPEAN TRADITIONS ERASES THE COMPLEXITY OF MY MULTIFACETED NATURE, ALONG WITH THE COMPLEXITY OF INDIGENOUS CULTURE.

I'M NOT JUST A PERSONIFICATION OR DEIFICATION OF A PASSIVE PLANT I PRESIDE OVER...

...MAGUEY AND I ARE LITERALLY ONE IN THE SAME.





Codex Yohualli Ehecatl p.16

flowering magwey

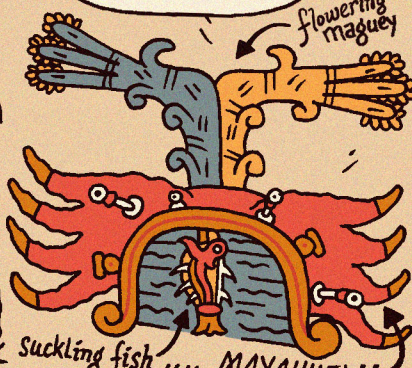
ADMITTEDLY THAT CAN MAKE MY JOB A BIT TRICKY WHEN IT COMES TO INTERPRETING REPRESENTATIONS OF YOU IN AZTEC ART...



suckling fish (child) MAYAHUEL

Codex Tonalpouhqui p.40

...WHERE IMAGERY IS OFTEN INTERCHANGEABLE.



suckling fish MAYAHUEL!!

Codex Yohualli Ehecatl p.51

BUT THAT'S WHY IT'S SO IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND THE MESOAMERICAN CONCEPT OF TEOTL, ALONG WITH THE HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF MAGUEY.



NOT juvenile/cobless corn.... FLOWERING, STARRY MAGUEY!

I'LL SAY!

Adapted from "Mayahuel" statue
Templo Mayor Museum
Mexico City

IT'S SIGNIFICANT THAT, BEFORE EUROPEANS ARRIVED, YOU WERE REGARDED AS A POWERFUL MOTHER FIGURE TO MILLIONS OF PEOPLE.

WHEN MANY PEOPLE THINK OF AZTECS, THE FIRST THING TO COME TO MIND IS BLOOD-THIRSTY, HEART-SACRIFICING WARRIORS.

WOMEN EITHER GET A BAD RAP, ARE SEXUALIZED, OR ARE COMPLETELY INVISIBLE.

WOMEN AND NATURE, FROM A COLONIAL PERSPECTIVE, WERE OFTEN CONSIDERED COMMODITIES - RESOURCES IN AN EXTRACTIVE RELATIONSHIP.

BUT FROM AN INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVE, IT'S A FAMILIAL RELATIONSHIP.

EVEN THOUGH YOUR STORY MAY BE CHALLENGING AT TIMES, IT SHOWS THAT INDIGENOUS PEOPLE VALUED WOMEN AND MOTHERS.

THEY ACKNOWLEDGED THESE PLANTS AS IMPORTANT AND WORTHY OF ADORATION. AND THEY RECOGNIZED THAT IN ORDER TO SURVIVE THEY NEEDED TO HAVE A GOOD RELATIONSHIP WITH THEM - WITH YOU.

AHHH. THANK YOU.

IT'S THE LEAST I CAN DO... MOTHER.

The End