



THE IXIPTLA

A *Whispering Vault* Hunt by Chris Pramas
Illustrated by Christopher Shy

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INTRODUCTION

This is a short Hunt that I've run many times at conventions to introduce people to *The Whispering Vault*. It usually runs around two and half hours. I've found that a typical four hour convention slot gives me enough time to let the players create their own Stalkers and then play this adventure. The historical information used here was taken from the extremely useful and highly recommended *GURPS Aztecs* book.

BACKSTORY

The Unbidden now known as the Ixiptla crossed into the Realm of Flesh in the year 1450, attracted to Mexico by the suffering of a famine and the grisly Aztec custom of human sacrifice. The Ixiptla surely had a plan, had some reason for crossing the Rift, but even he cannot remember it anymore. When he first crossed over and felt the hunger of the Beast, he had to feed it with the pain of mortals. He wasn't interested in killing his subjects, only making them feel the pain that the Ixiptla needed so badly. Usually with Unbidden, the Beast stage is a dangerous time that passes quickly, as does the hunger. But the Ixiptla enjoyed the pain so much that he continued to feed, even after leaving the Beast stage. He used his regained wits to pursue his all-consuming passion, and this is how he became known as the Ixiptla.

The Aztecs had a peculiar custom. Each year a handsome and fit man was chosen to impersonate Tezcatlipoca, the chief Aztec god, for the following year. This impersonator was known as the Ixiptla and it was his job to study divine behavior and to give blessings to the people. He lived like a god in the temple of Tezcatlipoca for one year. At the end of that year, he ascended to the top of the temple and was immediately sacrificed by the Aztec priests. After

his living heart was ripped from his body, his remains were fed to the Emperor and other dignitaries. No other human sacrifices were performed that day.

The Unbidden, having traveled as a Stranger to Aztec town, learned of the Ixiptla and quickly determined to make the Ixiptla his new Vessel. With his otherworldly powers, this was quickly done and the Unbidden installed himself in the Temple of Tezcatlipoca in 1451. However, at the end of the appointed year, the Ixiptla refused to be sacrificed and instead tore the heart out of the High Priest instead. Since then, the Ixiptla has effectively run the town. He now uses the town as his private reservoir of pain and his first act was to ban human sacrifice and banish the priests from his temple. Killing, he thinks, is a waste of potential. Much better to keep them alive and find ever more delicious ways to feel their pain. The year 1452 witnessed the Great Famine, followed by a terrible drought. The Ixiptla was overjoyed by these developments and intensified their effects in the town by use of his Life Link. Things have gone terribly wrong in this unnamed Aztec town, but only one man had the strength of will to do something about it.



TIME AND PLACE

This Hunt is set in the year 1452 CE in the great Empire of the Aztecs. The Emperor is Moctezuma I, a great conqueror who extended the empire to the hot Gulf Coast. The culture of the Aztecs certainly comes a shock to some 20th century morals, especially their belief in human sacrifice. The Aztecs believed, however, that the first gods had sacrificed themselves so that the sun might be created and kept moving. The blood and hearts offered up by their priests followed in this tradition and were necessary in their eyes to keep the sun rising each day. Interestingly, the Unbidden has banned human sacrifice and the Stalkers, by Binding him and Mending the Enigma, will be reinstating a practice many of them may think barbaric. No one said the Dream was fair.





THE CALL

The Call comes from one of the banished priests, in the form of a prayer to Tezcatlipoca. His chanting crashes into the consciousness of one of the Stalkers.

"Mighty Tezcatlipoca, I pray to you in our time of need. Tell me, o glorious one, why have the sacrifices stopped? Why doesn't the blood flow on your altars of stone? The

gods sacrificed themselves so that the Sun might rise, and it is our sacred duty to do the same. Yet the Ixiptla sits in your temple while famine and drought ravage the land, and the your priests hide in fear. Your people suffer, mighty Tezcatlipoca, the land weeps. Please accept my most humble sacrifice."

THE GUARDIAN

The Stalkers can summon the Navigator as normal and begin to walk the Winding Path. The Guardian of this particular Navigator, however, takes a rather peculiar form.

As the Stalkers walk the winding path, they soon see the Barrier up ahead. The Barrier looks like an enormous jungle gym that is so complex and interwoven that it creates a virtual wall. Standing in front of the jungle gym is a little girl in a sun dress sucking on a lollipop. She is the Guardian.

When the Stalkers approach she says, "I'm sorry, but you can't play on my jungle gym."

Stalkers may be amused to see a little girl blocking their way, but she is deadly serious. If they try to get by her, she says, "You can't play here unless you have a note from Mom and Dad." The Stalkers may try ploys like Conjuring notes, but what she's really looking for is for the Stalkers to show her their keys. Each Stalker will have to show her their "note" for her to let

them through. If the Stalkers do not play along, she hisses and her arms turn into masses of writhing snakes. She will fight them if they do not produce their keys.

Once she has seen everyone's notes, she steps aside. A section of the jungle gym simply swings open, allowing the Stalker's to continue. As they pass through the Barrier, the Guardian says, "Have fun in the playground."

THE SUPPLICANT

The Stalkers appear in a small, sparsely furnished room made of stone. The first thing they notice is that it is incredibly hot here. The second thing they notice is the body on the floor. This is the Suppliant, an Aztec priest in his feathered robes. He lies on the ground in a widening pool of blood with a slit throat. He also holds a blood covered knife clenched tightly in his right hand. After delivering up his prayer, the priest sacrificed himself to the gods so that his land might live again.

Stalkers who are masters of Delve can speak to his dead spirit. He tells them that the Ixiptla stopped the sacrifices and banished the priests, and that his own final act was an attempt to gain the aid of Tezcatlipoca. At this point, the Delving Stalker will relive the recent self-sacrifice. Have the Stalker make a Willpower Challenge Roll with a Difficulty of 12 or lose one Vitality. Stalkers interested in finding out what the hell an Ixiptla is can make a Difficult History Challenge to find out. Those who make an Average History Challenge know that they are

in 15th century Mexico and that Tezcatlipoca was the chief god of the Aztecs.

The room itself has little of interest, although there is a window to the outside. This looks out onto a square. The earth outside is dried and cracked and the fountain in the square is full of dust. In the distance an large Aztec temple can be seen.

While the Stalkers are looking around the priests room or the square, they hear horrible screams coming from the building next door.





FEEL THE PAIN

The Stalkers burst into the small house to find a man and woman writhing on the floor and screaming in agony. At first glance nothing seems to be wrong with them but any Stalker who makes an Average Perception Challenge sees a large bulge sliding across the man's stomach, as if something were moving beneath his skin. Then both victims bolt upright and open their mouths up wide. A Bloodwyrms (Dangerous Prey, page 65) flies out each of their mouths and attacks the nearest Stalker. These Shadows appear as large leathery worm creatures with many tendrils and hooks on either end of their bodies. This combat should be quick and easy, but it serves to familiarize the players with how combat works.

These Bloodwyrms are the minions of the Ixiptla, which allows the Unbidden to share in their sensations. The Ixiptla is using them to taste the exquisite agony caused when the Bloodwyrms tear someone open from the inside. The injuries to the man prove fatal but the woman is luckier and the Stalkers can talk to her

BLOODWYRM

Fortitude	5
Vitality	9
Initiative	13
Defend	14
Perceive	8
Resolve	14

Combat

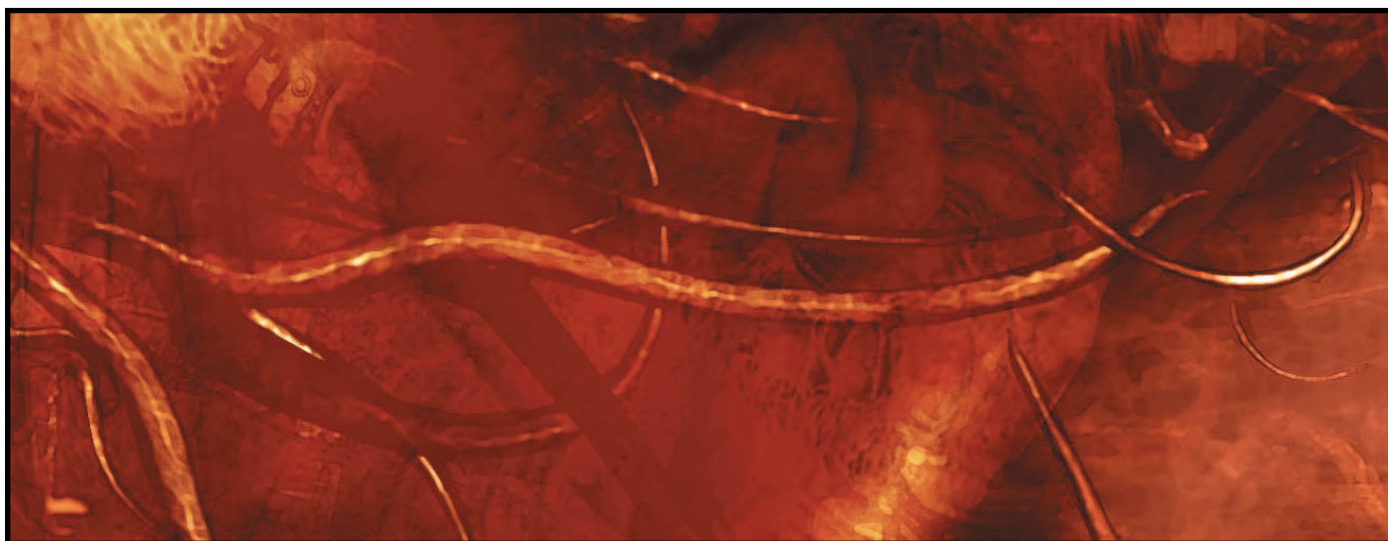
Attack by leaping at its opponent and Boring into their bodies. (Attack 12, 4D Damage but no more than two points of Vitality). Once the bore attack causes a victim to lose Vitality, it latches on and begins to feed off his pain which causes 2D Damage at the end of every round. Any Stalker with at least three keys (i.e. most

Stalkers) who loses Vitality to the Bore attack has to make a Fortitude Challenge against a Difficulty of 12 or lose a die of Dexterity until they return to the Realm of Essence. [For the purpose of this adventure, you can forget about this last power if you think it'll discourage your players. You want them to have fun their first time out after all.]

(although she is traumatized and her husband has just been killed). She can tell them that the drought and famine are slowly destroying the town and that the Ixiptla and his four female attendants run the town from the temple. If any of the Stalkers are rude to

her, or belittle her grief, she will not cooperate.

If you do not have Dangerous Prey, here is a brief summary of the Bloodwyrms. The stats have been slightly modified for these particular specimens.





THROUGH THE TOWN

The Stalkers should have figured out by this point that they need to go to the temple to find the Ixiptla. If they haven't figured this out for some reason, mention how that large and imposing pyramid dominates the town.

Navigating through town is easy enough. The streets and markets are eerily empty. Sometimes the Stalkers will see someone looking at them out of window, but these people always drop from sight when spotted. When the Stalkers have gotten about half way to the pyramid, they hear a crowd up ahead. Continuing on, they come a wide plaza full of townspeople. Despite the heat, the locals are gathering in the plaza to watch a strange spectacle.

EAGLE AND JAGUAR

The Stalkers see that the crowd has gathered to watch some kind of ritual combat. On either end of the plaza are two groups of Aztec warriors. One group wears war costumes made of

Eagle feathers, while the other wears the skins of Jaguars. They all carry Macauitl, the wooden Aztec swords rimmed with sharpened flint or obsidian, and shields. The warriors are obviously exhausted and each bears many wounds. It is plain to see that they've been fighting for a long time. About a half dozen bodies lie motionless in the sun in between the two groups.

An easy Perception Challenge reveals two cowed figures behind each group. Even as the Stalkers watch, the cowed figures begin to push the warriors forward and at each other. The Eagle and Jaguar warriors stagger forward, obviously more frightened of the cowed ones than of their opponents. Reluctantly, the two bands clash. There are no war cries or surprise charges. The warriors just stumble together and began to fight. As blows are exchanged, it becomes clear that their Macauitl have been dulled. The crowd is silent and watch glassy-eyed, while the cowed figures make certain that none of the warriors retreat.

The Stalkers can try to interfere in any number of ways. When they do,

they discover that the cowed figures are in fact Pain Mothers (Whispering Vault, page 109). They are the four female attendants of the Ixiptla and they are making sure their master has more pain to feed on. The Eagle and Jaguar warriors have been fighting all day, but they use blunted weapons so the fights are longer and more painful. The Pain Mothers really enjoy their work, and react with hostility to any interruption. If combat erupts, most of the spectators and warriors seize the opportunity to flee, creating a scene of utter chaos in the plaza. Play up the confusion and mayhem as the fight goes on.

Note, however, that the Stalkers can easily walk away from the plaza. They do not have to fight the Pain Mothers at all. In fact, it's better for them to conserve their strength for their confrontation with the Ixiptla. If they do fight, you might consider lowering the number of Pain Mothers depending on how large your Circle is. Four is the traditional number of attendants for the Ixiptla, but don't let that straight-jacket you. Challenge the Stalkers but be sure not to overwhelm them.

THE TEMPLE OF TEZCATLIPOCA

After the encounter with the Pain Mothers, the Stalkers are free to approach the great temple. It is of typical Aztec design, with a over a 50 steps leading to its upper sanctuary. There are no entrances at ground level. To go in, one must climb up the steps. Stalkers who try to Dissipate through the walls will be surprised to find that this doesn't work. They can speculate as to why this is, but they'll find out soon enough.

On top of the pyramid is the chief sanctuary, a large area under a red roof that brings the pyramid to its point. Here is an imposing statue of Tezcatlipoca himself, and a ceremonial altar stained with blood. On top of the altar lies the body of the Aztec High Priest. Closer investigation shows that his chest has been ripped open and that his heart is missing. Despite this, he opens his eyes when

the Stalkers approach and says in a raspy voice, "Please, let me die...." It should be obvious that he is the Focus of the Enigma. Kind Stalkers, or those who don't get it yet, may try to kill this man. No matter what they do, he continues to live in his heartless state. Only Binding the Unbidden and Mending the Enigma will set him free.





INTO THE HEART

Behind the statue of Tezcatlipoca is a forbidding dark opening that leads to the heart of the temple. The Stalkers have little choice but to climb inside. They quickly enter a series of tunnels. These circular passageways are steamy hot and the walls seem to pulsate with life. When they come to a door, the Stalkers find that the portals have been transmuted into fleshy valves that open and close spasmodically. The whole interior of the temple has become a giant living heart, and this is why Stalkers cannot dissipate through its walls.

The Stalkers find that all the passages lead downward towards the central chamber of the pyramid. They should not have any trouble finding their way to Ixiptla and you could even have the valves lead the Stalkers to where they want to go. Enterprising GM's who know that they're going to have plenty of time with their group may want to flesh the pyramid out and make it into a true lair. This can be as complex or as simple as you like, but GM's with access to Dangerous Prey are encouraged to look at the section on Lairs on pages 29-35 for inspiration.

THE FINAL CONFRONTATION

Sooner or later the Stalkers will find the central chamber of the temple. It is a huge room (roughly 50'x50'x25'), full with statues of the Aztec gods. Dominating the room is the Ixiptla's palanquin, a platform and throne from which he rules the town. Surrounding him are a dozen Aztec warriors, bodyguards originally assigned to keep him

in the temple, now his devout servants. The Ixiptla sits on his throne, and the Stalkers immediately notice that he looks uncannily like the statue of Tezcatlipoca on top of the pyramid. His skin is painted black and there is a crystal plug through his lip. A golden headband adorns his brow and golden foot rattles hang from his ankles. He sits with his eyes closed, body shuddering with each pulse of the chambers walls. All the pain of the town flows to this chamber and the Ixiptla sucks up every drop of that precious feeling.

When the Stalkers enter, the Ixiptla opens his eyes and grins widely. "I've been looking forward to this visit," he pronounces from the throne. "I've been wondering if the pain of a Stalker has a different flavor than that of humans. Bastards of Flesh and Essence that you are, I predict your pain will be...delicious."

The Stalkers can try to talk him down, but the Ixiptla is far too attached to the Flesh to leave willingly. The Stalkers are going to have to deal with him and his servants. His bodyguard are members of the Shorn Ones, the elite of the Aztec military. Although only human, they are Driven. You may want to adjust their number, depending on the size of your Circle. GM's may also bring some of the Pain Mothers into this combat, if they are still in the Flesh. Only do this if the Stalkers are beating the Ixiptla too quickly, but make sure you give them a dramatically appropriate entrance.

When the combat is over, the Stalkers can return to the top of the temple and Mend the Enigma. A Mending Challenge Roll of 12 or more fixes this tear in the Dream and the High Priest sighs gratefully as he shuffles off this mortal coil. The Stalkers are then free to take their cap-

tive to the Whispering Vault and then return to their Domains. The Aztecs for their part are free to return to their normal cycle of human sacrifice. It's a part of the Dream, after all, and cannot be tampered with.

THE SHORN ONES

Fortitude	2
Vitality	5
Initiative	8
Defend	10
Perceive	10
Resolve	12
Attack	10
Strength	2
Damage	4 (with Macauitl)

THE IXIPTLA

Fortitude	4 / 5
Vitality	11 / 21
Initiative	12 / 14
Defend	13 / 15
Perceive	15 / 16
Resolve	18 / 20

COMBAT (Vessel)

With Macauitl (Attack 13, 4D Damage)

COMBAT (Avatar)

The Ixiptla can either use his whip (Attack 15, 4D Damage) or his red hot pincers (Attack 15, 6D Damage), or both if using his Quickening power (see below). Opponents hit by the whip are entangled and suffer a -2 to their Attack and Defend Challenges





until they can make a Strength roll of 10+. Opponents hit by the red hot pincers have been grabbed, and the Ixiptla will automatically cause his damage the next round unless the Stalker can make a Strength roll of 12+ to break free.

Special Abilities

Quickening, Shred, and Summoning. Quickening and Shred can be found in *Dangerous Prey* on pages 26 and 27. A brief recap is provided below for those without *Dangerous Prey*.

Quickening: The Ixiptla can spend one point of Vitality to add his Fortitude to his Initiative and either

move twice as fast or attack twice. If used two or more rounds in a row without a break, it costs an additional point of Vitality.

Shred: The Ixiptla can shoot a blast of sharpened glass at one opponent. This inflicts 4D of damage and Stalkers who lose 3 or more Vitality from this attack must lower their Fortitude by 1 against the next 3 physical attacks.

Aversions

Joy and happiness other than his own.

Fetishes

Loves to feel the pain of others.

Idiosyncrasies

Tends to moan with pleasure at all the wrong times.

Avatar

The Ixiptla's Avatar appears as a tall, gaunt humanoid wearing leather pants and big engineer's boots. His naked midriff is red with welts and scabs, as if he has been whipped repeatedly and thoroughly. Instead of hands, he has instruments of torture: a metallic mesh whip and a set of red hot pincers. His face is covered with a leather mask with zippers over the eyes and mouth. When in this form, he does not speak, but only moans in pleasure.

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