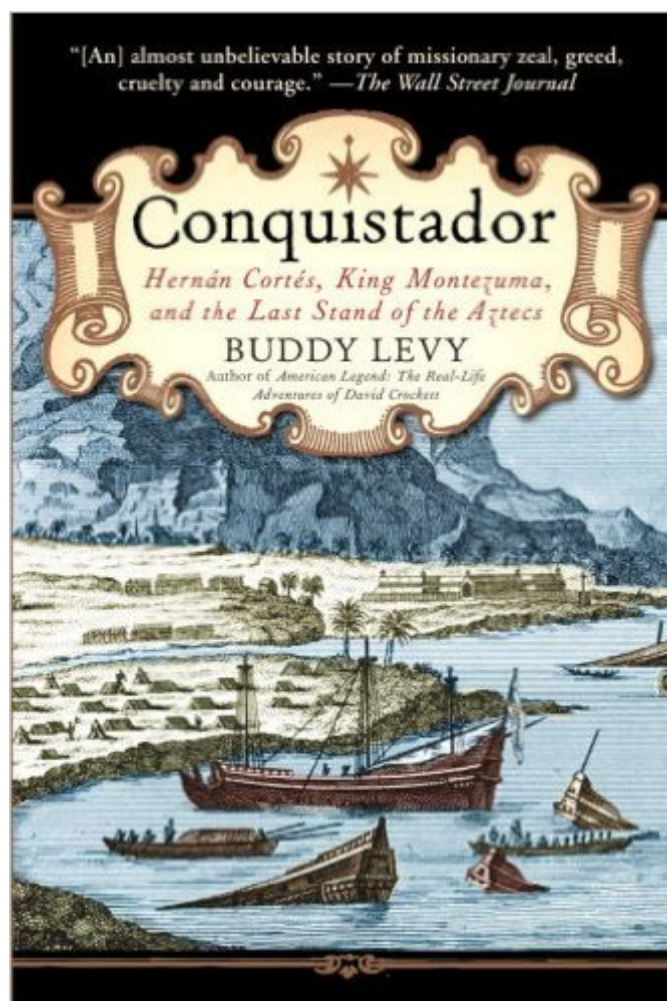


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Conquistador: Hernan Cortes, King Montezuma, And The Last Stand Of The Aztecs



Synopsis

In this astonishing work of scholarship that reads like an edge-of-your-seat adventure thriller, acclaimed historian Buddy Levy records the last days of the Aztec empire and the two men at the center of an epic clash of cultures perhaps unequalled to this day. It was a moment unique in human history, the face-to-face meeting between two men from civilizations a world apart. In 1519, Hernán Cortés arrived on the shores of Mexico, determined not only to expand the Spanish empire but to convert the natives to Catholicism and carry off a fortune in gold. That he saw nothing paradoxical in carrying out his intentions by virtually annihilating a proud and accomplished native people is one of the most remarkable and tragic aspects of this unforgettable story. In Tenochtitlán Cortés met his Aztec counterpart, Montezuma: king, divinity, commander of the most powerful military machine in the Americas and ruler of a city whose splendor equaled anything in Europe. Yet in less than two years, Cortés defeated the entire Aztec nation in one of the most astounding battles ever waged. The story of a lost kingdom, a relentless conqueror, and a doomed warrior, Conquistador is history at its most riveting.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In a letter quoted by Buddy Levy in his magnificent Conquistador, Hernan Cortes confesses that he and his men suffer from a particular "disease of the heart": a lust for gold and power. The tale of the unhappy outcome of that disease, the destruction of one of the New World's mightiest empires in an astoundingly short time by an astoundingly small handful of adventurers, is the most apparent storyline in Conquistador. Levy tells it with eloquence and accuracy. But there's another storyline in

the book that I find just as fascinating. The disease of the heart which afflicted Cortes and his men also troubled Montezuma, for the Aztec Empire, despite its achievements in science and art, was also a bloodthirsty machine that subjugated native peoples, sacrificed tens of thousands to pitiless gods, and created caste systems in which the many were ground under the feet of the few. What Levy gives us, then, is a double portrait of two invalids suffering from similar illnesses. One, a European captain with fewer than 500 men, the other a divine emperor with life-or-death power over 15 million people. In the end, both of them died from their diseases, Montezuma and his empire literally, Cortes morally and (despite his sporadic religious zealotry) spiritually. Curiously, neither of them seemed to have quite the necessary stamina to survive their illness. In telling the story of the clash between these two men, Levy explores the tactics by which Cortes managed to defeat Montezuma: a combination of bluster, good luck, superior technology, alliances with disgruntled indigenous peoples, and hard fighting.

Conquistador: Hernan Cortes, King Montezuma, and the Last Stand of the Aztecs by Buddy Levy. 448 pages. 2008. The Conquest of Mexico was not a single event, it was not the result of disease, treachery, technology, or evil it was a long two year slog of battles won and battles lost. Too often the events surrounding the Conquest are simplified to issues of technology or disease and to a demonizing of the Spaniards. The reality is of course more nuanced and the simplification denigrates all sides. This book does an admirable job of introducing the History and some of the issues related to the Conquest in an honest way. It draws on sources from all sides, including modern research and legacy studies. It presents the events in a complete enough narrative to tell the story without getting bogged down in the details, some of which can be quite gory. There are many other books available on this same topic but they tend to be one-sided or focused on a single topic. When for instance a writer tries to make the case that Spanish victory was predicated on superior technology the writer would denigrate Spanish tactics, Aztec adaptations to technology and tactics. The focal point of this book is on the two leaders, Cortes and Montezuma. The image of Cortes presented is a fairly complete image. This image may very well surprise many casual readers. Cortes was a real person and defies simple demonizing. He was physically very brave almost to the point of abject recklessness. The travail he endured is astounding. Cortes did not win every battle he presided over the long retreat from Mexico City and he proved capable of learning and adapting to the methods and abilities of his opponents.

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