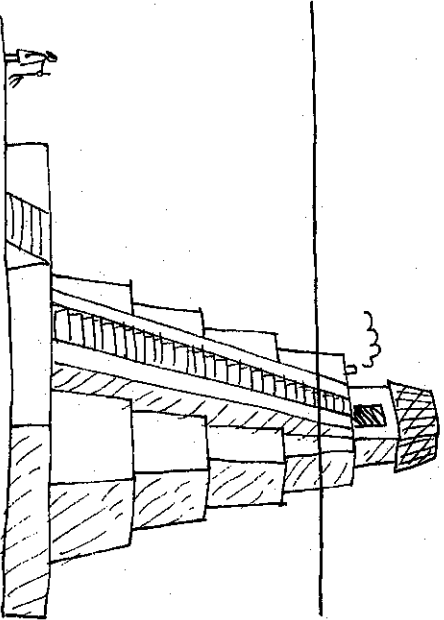


12 OCTOBER - 13 OCTOBER: DAYS OF THE FEAST OF THE MOUNTAINS

13 OCTOBER Those Aztecs have a plant called amaranth. Today they ground it up into a paste and baked it into models of the gods and snakes. But did they eat them? No! They offered them to the gods. I'll never understand these Aztecs if I live to be 50 years old. In fact I would be glad to reach 15 years old! I'm just grateful I've survived another year without getting myself sacrificed.



Live like an Aztec

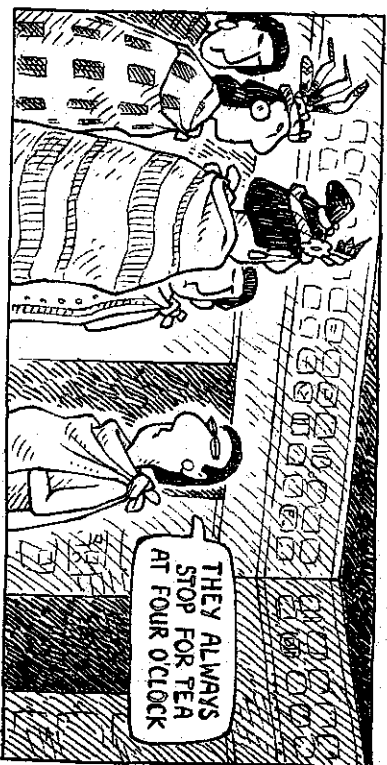
The Aztecs were fighters. By 1500 they had conquered most of Mexico. The defeated people had to supply the Aztec homeland at Tenochtitlan with food, clothing and slaves.

But most of all the Aztecs wanted defeated warriors for their sacrifices.

Problem: How could they defeat warriors when they'd conquered Mexico and there was no one left to beat?

Answer: The Aztecs sent in spies. Aztec traders went in disguise to strange cities and looked for signs of rebellion against the Aztec rule. If they found any sign of rebel forces they encouraged it! 'Go on ... fight the Aztecs! I'll bet you could beat the loincloths off them, lads!'

As soon as the rebels went into action the Aztecs would attack and win. They would win because their trader-spies would have told them all the enemy weaknesses.

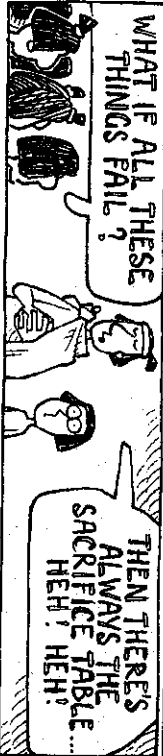
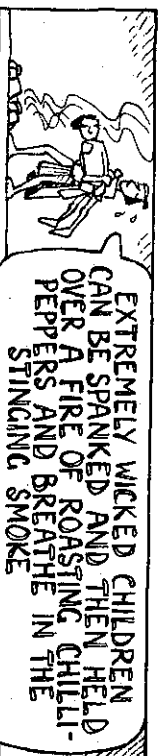
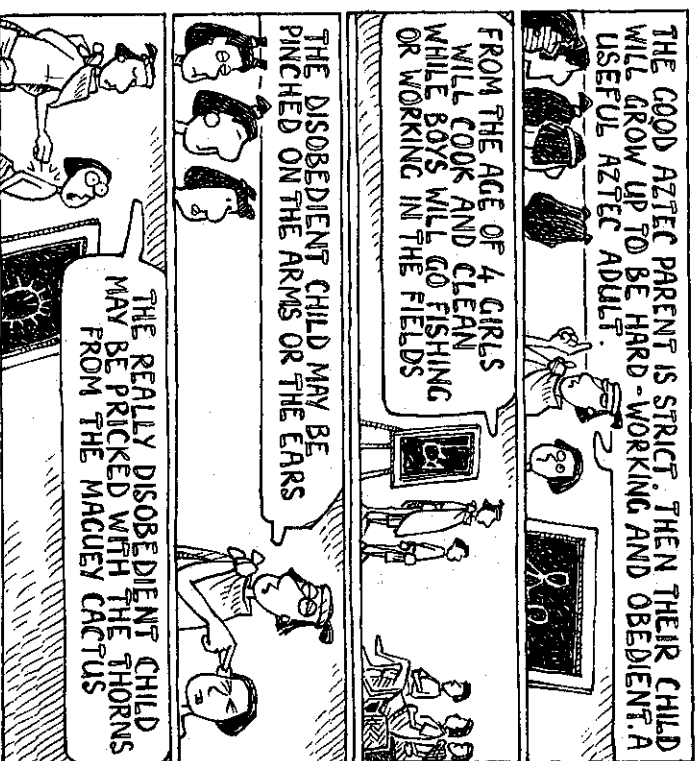


The Aztec warriors tried to capture the rebels alive so they could sacrifice them later in Tenochtitlan. That's mean and that's cheating ... but it was the Aztec way of making sure the sun kept moving in the sky.

Cruel to kids

If you wanted the gods to bring you rain or a good harvest then you had to give them gifts. You had to give them really precious gifts, of course, not just any old rubbish. What was the most precious gift they could give? A life. And what was the most precious life? The life of a child, of course. The Aztecs must have really loved children because they sacrificed dozens every year.

Of course these would usually be captured slave children. Aztecs were a bit tougher with their own children. The Aztec child was taught not to expect a happy life... and it didn't get one! How would you like to have been an Aztec child?



Did you know...?

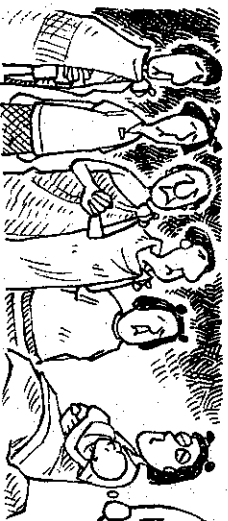
1 Boys were trained to be warriors. When they were baptized at a few days old they were given their warrior equipment - a miniature loincloth, a cloak, a shield and four arrows.



2 As boys grew older they were told, 'The house you were born in is not your true home - that is out there on the battlefield. Your mission is to give the sun the blood of your enemies to drink.'

3 Girls, on the other hand, were given a skirt, a blouse and weaving equipment. They were told that their place was in the home.

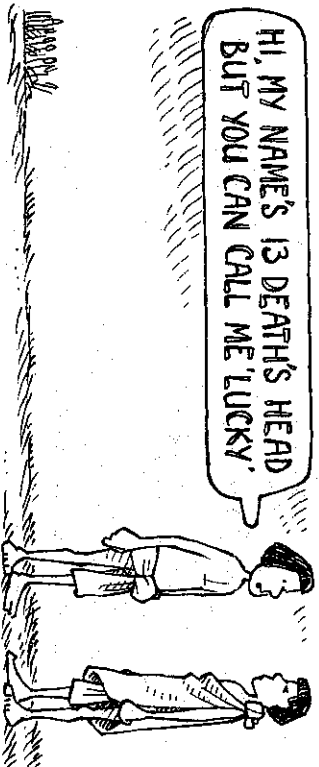
4 The first words a baby heard when it was born were: 'You have come to this earth which is a place of torment, a place of pain, a place of weariness, a place of illness, thirst, hunger and weeping.' Cheerful stuff. Just the sort of thing you want to hear after all the effort to get born in the first place.



AND A VERY
HAPPY BIRTHDAY
TO YOU TOO!

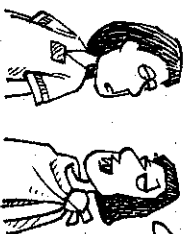
5 A child would be named after the day on which it was born. There were 20 days and 18 months but the months could have some embarrassing names. Imagine going through life as Six Dog (you'd be sick as a dog), Ten Crocodile (you'd be a bit snappy), or Eight Monkey (and if you were Aztec you would have ate monkey). Perhaps you'd prefer to be a Wind, a Vulture, a Rabbit, a Lizard, a Flower or a Death's Head?

HI, MY NAME'S 13 DEATH'S HEAD
BUT YOU CAN CALL ME 'LUCKY'



6 Pottery figures of around AD 600 to 900 show Mexican native boys grinning... with their top teeth filed to a point! It probably helped them eat their roast dog. But would you like to have your teeth filed? Eecccugh!

DO YOU HAVE ANY FILLINGS?



NOPE, BUT I'VE GOT A
COUPLE OF FILLINGS



7 If a family was very poor then there was a quick and easy way to make some money. Sell the kids! This was an idea copied from the Maya. Slave traders would buy healthy children and take them to market. The children would have to work hard for hours on end or be punished. A bit like school, really.

HOW MANY TIMES DO I HAVE TO TELL YOU WE AREN'T
POOR, WE DON'T HAVE TO SELL YOUR LITTLE BROTHER



8 If a child died then it wouldn't get a coffin. It would be buried in a jar. Hopefully no one would later dig up the jar and mistake it for a jar of jam.

9 The Aztecs were certainly the only people in the world of the 1500s to have schooling for all boys and girls. But they didn't start school till they were 15 years old and stopped at

the age of marriage – about 20. The boys could choose between schools for priests and schools for warriors. Girls generally learned singing and dancing. Then, of course, there was...

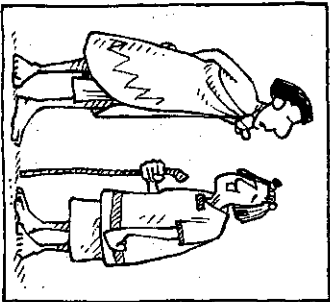
Mexican marriage

Want to marry your loved one in a genuine Aztec ceremony? This is how boys can go about it. (Sadly, girls, you don't have a lot of say in this!)

Could you survive as an Aztec? Imagine you are an Aztec boy. Try the following test.

1 First choose your bride. Who gets you permission to marry the girl?

- a) You do it yourself, boys.
- b) You ask your 'Best Man' (best friend) to do it for you.
- c) You ask an old woman to do it for you.



2 Who do you ask?

- a) Ask the girl, of course.
- b) Ask the priests if the gods agree to the marriage.
- c) Ask the girl's family.

3 You also need permission to get married yourself. Who do you ask?

- a) Your mum.
- b) Your dad.
- c) Your teacher.



4 How do you choose your wedding day?

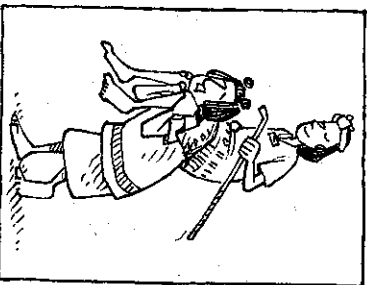
- a) You agree a day with your bride.
- b) Everyone marries on the same day so you don't have to choose.
- c) Read your horoscope and make sure it is a 'good' day on the Aztec calendar.

5 There is a feast before the wedding. Who arranges that?

- a) You do it yourself, cooking food that you've hunted for yourself.
- b) Your mother cooks your favourite meal with enough for everyone to share.
- c) The bride's parents arrange the feast so you don't have to worry about a thing.

6 The wedding takes place after the feast and at night. How does the bride travel to your house for the ceremony?

- a) In a taxi.
- b) You carry her on your back.
- c) She is carried on the back of an old woman.

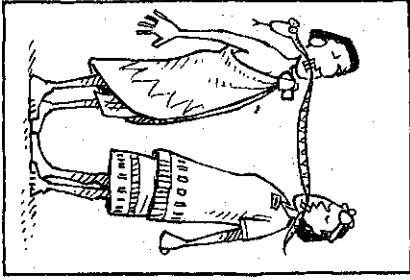


7 How do the guests get from the feast to the wedding at your house?

- a) They ride on the backs of oxen.
 - b) They form a long line, join hands and dance from the bride's house to yours.
 - c) They have a torch-lit procession.
- 8 Everyone gives you a wedding present. When do you get your presents?
- a) When you move into your new house.
 - b) Straight after the wedding.
 - c) Just before the wedding.



- 9 How are you joined together in marriage?
- a) You and your bride each grip one end of a snake between your teeth - the boy takes the head and the girl takes the tail.
 - b) You simply join hands and swap rings.
 - c) The boy's cloak is tied to the girl's blouse.



- 10 There is a final feast with alcohol to drink. But only certain people are allowed to drink. Who can booze?
- a) You and your friends.
 - b) Everyone except the bride and groom.
 - c) Any guests over the age of 30.



Answers: All c) answers are correct. All a) and b) answers are wrong.

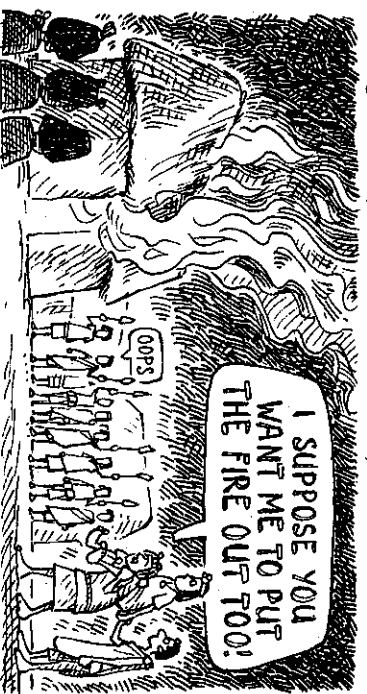
- 1 Boys, choose your bride. It has to be someone of your own position in society. You must use an old woman as the messenger to carry your proposal. Your granny would do.
- 2 Ask the girl's family if you can marry her. Don't bother asking the girl herself because you don't need her permission.
- 3 Send your messenger to ask your teacher if you can marry! If the teacher says 'No!' then you won't be allowed.



HOW COME EVERYONE ELSE AROUND HERE HAS A CHANCE TO OBJECT EXCEPT ME?

- 4 Choose the wedding day. This needs to be a 'good' day on the Aztec calendar. Perhaps you could look up your horoscope in a book? Saturdays are good days.
- 5 The girl's family organizes a feast at her house which guests eat while she has her wedding dress and make-up put on.
- 6 After dinner you must wait until dark because marriages take place at night. The bride is carried on the back of an old woman to the boy's house. If your granny isn't worn out with all the running around maybe she can carry the bride.

7 Guests follow in a procession by the light of torches flaming torches, not electric torches, of course.



8 The couple sit on a mat spread in front of the fire and everyone gives them wedding presents. (Note: the Aztecs didn't have pop-up toasters, stainless steel butter dishes or electric kettles so don't give them.)

9 The couple are married when the boy's cloak is tied to the girl's blouse. This is still known today as tying the knot.

10 There's another feast (if you've recovered from the one at the girl's house!). This time the guests over the age of 30 can drink alcohol and it is no disgrace to get drunk. (Warning: Anyone under 30 getting drunk faces a beating for this crime. The next time they are caught they will be executed!)

How did you score?

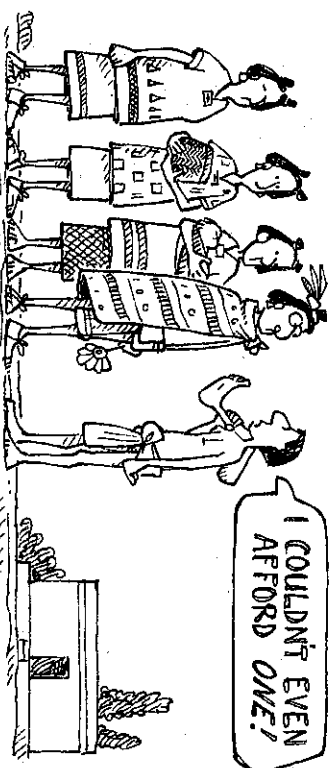
10 Chear

5 - 9 Lucky

1 - 4 Get your brain cells cleaned

0 You would make a really good Aztec sacrifice

Now, boys, if you enjoyed that why not try it again with another girl ... and again with another girl ... and again with another girl. And again and again and again. How many wives can you afford?



King Nezahualpilli had 2,000 wives and 144 children. How on earth did he remember their names? And, talking about kings...

The new emperor's new clothes

In Britain the monarchs have been crowned for over a thousand years in the richest robes money can buy. Thick silks, warm velvets and fur-trimmed collars. Very cosy in London fogs and Edinburgh drizzle.

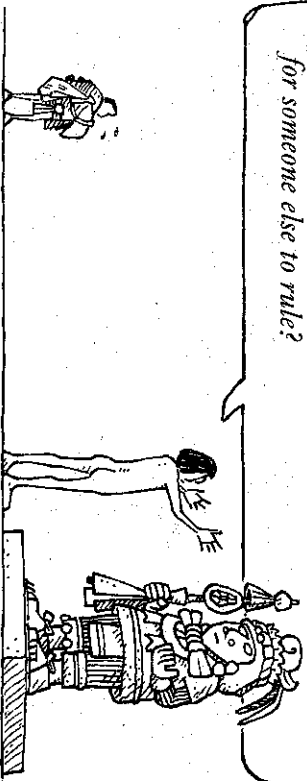
The kings and queens dressed up as if to say, 'Look how grand I am, you peasants!'

But a new Aztec emperor did the opposite. He was taken in front of the sun god and had to tell the god what a feeble little human being he really was.

The emperor spent four days fasting (or three days if he was really, really fast!).

Then he took off all his clothes and stood in front of the statue of the god and said...

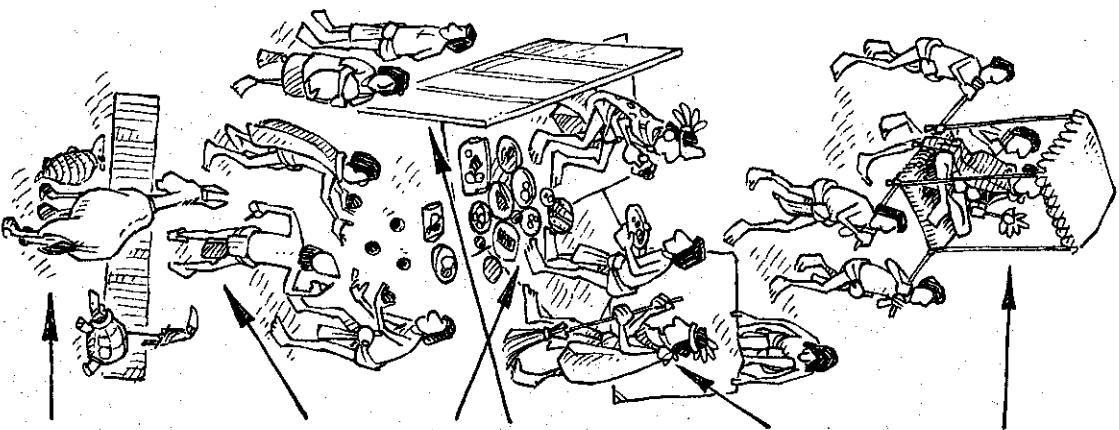
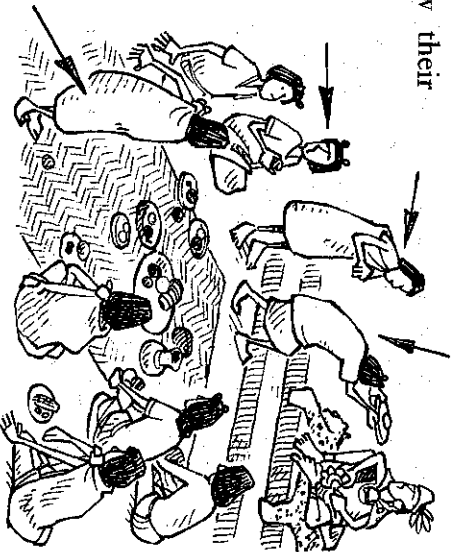
Oh master, oh night, oh wind, I am so poor. How can I work for this city? How can I work for its people? For I am blind, I am deaf, I am brainless and I am covered in filth. Maybe you've made a mistake and you are looking for someone else to rule?



Imagine the shock he'd get if the god said, 'All right, mate, get your kit on and push off. I'll find someone better!'

Of course all this 'humble' business didn't last long ... it never does with emperors and kings. As soon as the coronation was over he went off to a feast where...

- every great lordly guest had to wear plain, simple clothes so they didn't look more grand than the emperor
- they had to bow their heads
- they were not allowed to look at emperor's face
- they were not allowed to turn their back on him so they had to walk out of his room backwards.



From then on...

- he was carried almost everywhere in a chair shaded by a canopy of precious feathers
- if he did decide to step down then nobles swept the ground in front of him and covered the ground with cloths so his feet never touched the earth
- whenever he ate he was shielded from the ordinary people by a screen of gold
- he was offered a choice of a hundred dishes of food at each meal
- he was entertained by clowns and jugglers while he ate
- he had a palace aviary with ten rooms full of birds and a palace zoo filled with animals from all over his empire - rattlesnakes were kept on a bed of feathers.

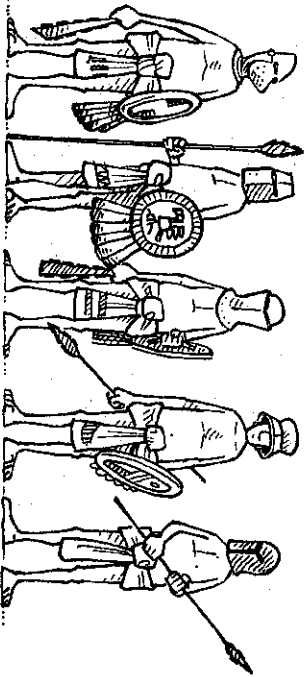
What a humble sort of life! And all he had to do was take his clothes off and admit to a stone statue he was stupid. Even you could do that!

Furious fighters

Aztec men lived to fight. When the war drum sounded every Aztec man was expected to pick up his weapons and join his group of about 800 men.

What other fantastic facts do you know about the Aztec warriors? Try this quirky quiz that Quetzalcoat would quite quickly complete. Just answer True or False to the following...

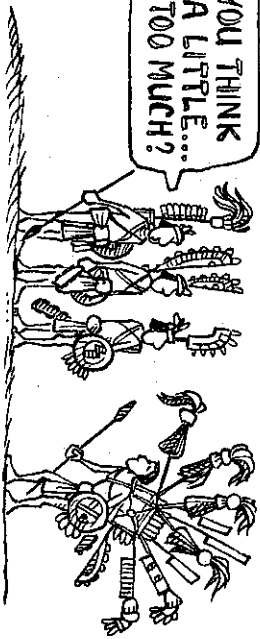
1 Aztec warriors wore armour.



2 The Aztecs had wooden clubs, edged with stone blades that were powerful enough to cut off a horse's head.

3 Aztec leaders were easy to spot because they wore large feather and reed constructions on their shoulders.

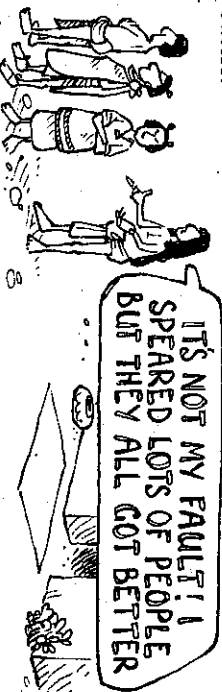
DON'T YOU THINK THAT'S A LITTLE... WELL... TOO MUCH?



4 Aztec warriors believed that dying in battle was a wonderful thing.

5 Rich Aztec warriors wore gold and jewels when they went into battle.

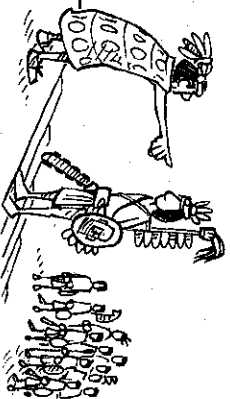
6 Warriors didn't get their hair cut till they'd killed someone in battle.



7 Aztecs believed in killing themselves rather than being captured.

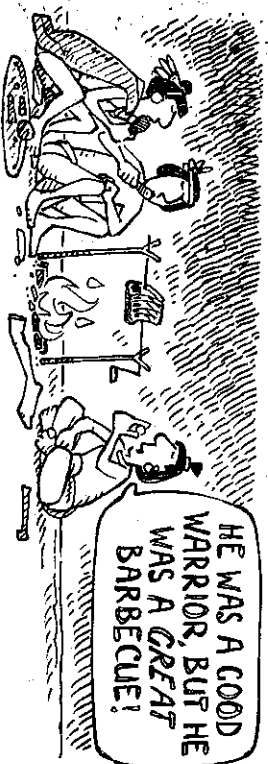
8 The Aztec army needed to capture 20 enemy fighters for sacrifice and no less.

WHAT! ONLY 19? GO BACK AND CONQUER THAT COUNTRY AGAIN!



9 Young Aztec men could be made full warriors by having their faces smeared with the blood of a heart that was still beating.

10 Warriors short of food would eat their dead friends.



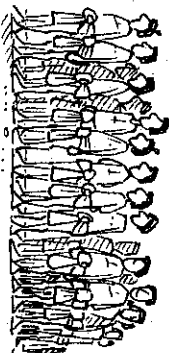
Answers:

- 1 True. But it wasn't metal armour because they didn't have steel. It was a padded cotton coat, soaked in salt water to make it hard.
- 2 True. At least that's what the Spanish soldiers said when they fought against them. Before the Spanish arrived the Aztecs did NOT cut off horses' heads because there were no horses in Mexico.
- 3 True. This was fine when they were fighting other Mexican armies. But the Spanish invaders had guns and were able to pick out the leaders easily and then pick them off.
- 4 True. They believed that they were immediately turned into hummingbirds and hummed off to join the sun god in his heaven. Hummmmm! A likely story.
- 5 True. Not just because they wanted to look cute as a corpse. They believed that precious stones had magical powers to protect them.



- 6 True. Young men had to leave some of their hair long – a disgraceful thing which told everyone that they weren't a real man yet.
- 7 False. King Moquihix tried to rebel against his Aztec friends. When his armies were defeated he threw himself off the top of his pyramid and died. The Aztec winners were so disgusted the dead king's body was not buried but left to rot.

- 8 True ... but they sometimes took more. The Aztec Emperor Tizoc (ruled 1481 – 1486) ordered that every man in three defeated tribes should be executed. Not 20 – but 20,000.



I HOPE THEIR ARMS GET TOO TIRED BY THE TIME THEY GET TO US

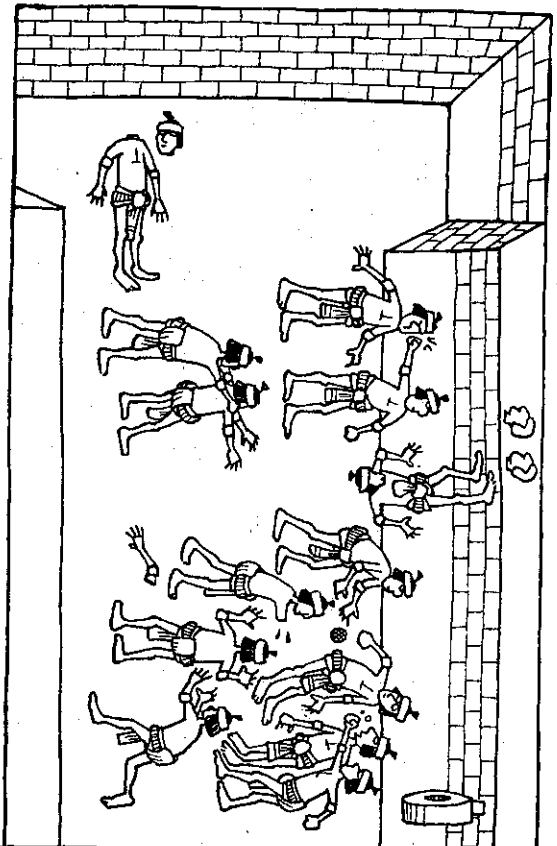
- 9 True. Even the Tlaxcallan friends of the Spanish performed this ritual while the Christian Spanish soldiers looked on.
- 10 False. Warriors were happy to eat dead enemies but refused to eat the friends they had fought with, no matter how hungry they were. In the 1521 battle against the Spanish they boiled the bark of trees and ate that but left thousands of their dead friends untouched.

The gory games

The Maya played a ball game that was later copied by the Aztecs.

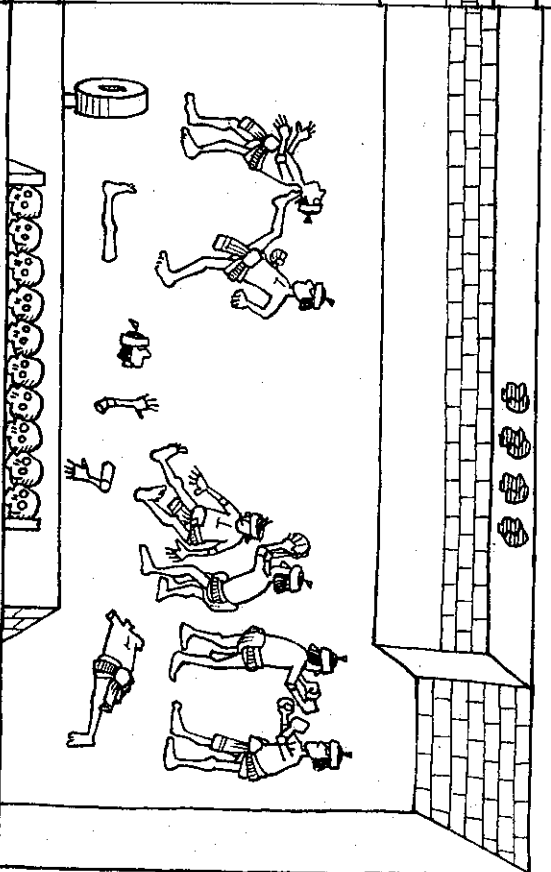
The Maya called it pok-a-tok, which sounds quite jolly – rather like ping-pong. The idea was that the better you played the 'ball game', the happier the gods would be and the better the crops would grow.

The ball game was linked with the ideas of human sacrifice and death. If you want to live like an Aztec then you may like to try this with a few friends. If you simply want to live ... then don't ever play it!



You need:

- A court 140 metres long and 36 metres wide in the shape of an '1'. The court is surrounded by stone walls. If that's a bit too big then try a basketball or netball court.
- A ring at each side of the court about 5 metres above the ground.
- Flat stones, carved in the shape of heads, to show the score.
- A rubber ball about 15 cm across.
- Two teams of about 10 a side – allow plenty of substitutes for players killed or carried off to hospital during the game.
- A 'skull rack' to hold the heads of sacrifice victims who'll be watching the game.
- Each player needs a helmet, and arm, knee and leg protectors made from boiled leather. (But don't go killing cows or cutting up shoes for their leather – skateboard protectors will do ... or simply don't play as rough as the Aztecs!)



The aim:

As in basketball the players of a team pass the ball among themselves till they are in a position to score. A score is made by putting the ball through one of the rings set in the wall.

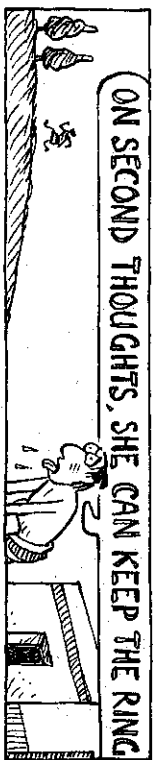
The rules:

You can use arms and legs to pass the ball but you must not use hands or feet ... and that's about it really! That's probably why players were often killed during a game – there were no rules to stop you killing an opponent, and losing often meant disgrace, which made killing the opposition a very good idea. So you might want to add a rule that makes killing an opponent a foul.

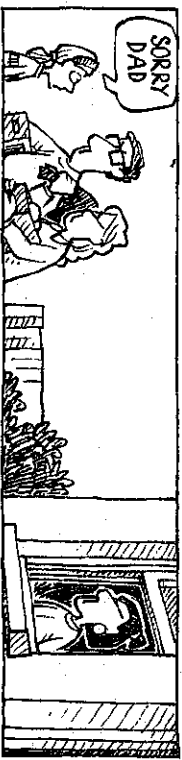
The result:

The team that scores first is the winner. Some historians say losing players were taken to a platform at the side of the pitch where their heads were cut off and struck on wooden

poles. (Although you might find that a smack in the loser's face with a stale kipper may be enough of a winning celebration.) A player who scored through the hoop could claim any jewellery or clothing from the spectators. The problem was the player would have to catch the spectator first.



Sometimes the teams can agree on prizes that the winner gets. You could gamble with gold, jade, slaves or even a house... but ask your parents before you bet your house on the result.



The truth about the ball game

Historians don't always know the truth about ancient worlds. They guess.

Most history books will tell you that the Mayan and Aztec 'ball game' was played to the death. But other historians say that is quite silly.

The truth is there were pictures carved into the walls of the ball courts. These pictures showed a ball game in which the losers lost their heads. But the pictures didn't tell the tale of a real ball game - all they did was tell the tale of a ball game that happened in an ancient legend.

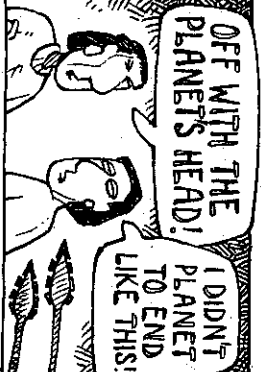
1 THE PLANET VENUS WAS A YOUNG GOD WHO PLAYED AGAINST AN UNDERWORLD GOD AT THE BALL GAME AND LOST...



4 BUT ONE DAY THE DAUGHTER OF THE LORD OF DEATH WALKED PAST AND THE SKULL SPAT AT HER...



2 THE PRIZE WAS THE LIFE OF THE LOSER...



3 SERPENTS OF BLOOD FLOWED FROM HIS NECK AS HIS SKULL WAS HUNG UP IN THE UNDERWORLD



5 AS A RESULT THE PRINCESS LATER GAVE BIRTH TO A BABY WHO GREW TO BE VENUS - THE NEW MORNING STAR AGAIN



So that's the story told on the walls of the ball courts. A story made up to explain why the planet Venus disappears from our skies then comes back again.

When tourists arrived in the Mayan ball courts their guides said, 'This is what happened when they played the ball game – the losers lost their heads.'

Then historians took this story and repeated it in their books. (Check your own school books on the Maya and Aztecs.) It is probably not true!

History can be horrible ... but historians can sometimes be horribler.

A game you wouldn't want to try...

Volador

You need:

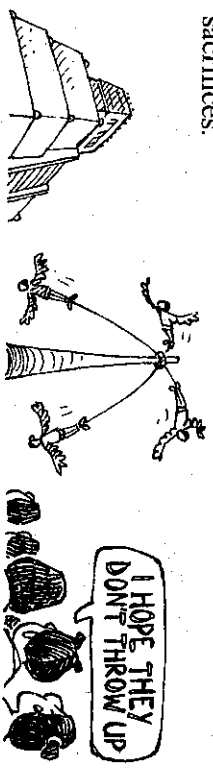
- A pole – tall and solid like a Maypole with a platform on top.
- Four ropes attached to the top.
- Bird costumes.

The rules:

Four players dress up as birds, climb to the top of the pole and fasten the ropes under their arms. Each bird jumps off the top of the pole and swings round it 13 times. When four players have swung round 13 times they have created the lucky number 52 and this will make sure the Sun god continues to fly around the earth.

The result:

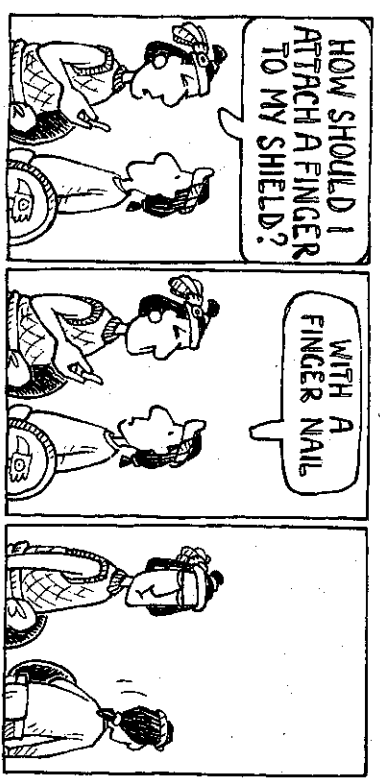
Nothing really. Just a sort of Aztec team-bungee-jump in honour of the Sun god, and a lot less messy than heart sacrifices.



Foul for females

Women were not very well treated in the Aztec world. But they could do one thing that would make men respect them ... they could die giving birth. That was the bravest thing a woman could do, the men said.

The unfortunate woman's ghost haunted crossroads at night. It was very unlucky to meet her. But Aztecs didn't think the dead woman's body was unlucky. Quite the opposite, they believed it had magical powers. If an Aztec warrior could just cut off a finger and some hair from her body then he could fasten it on to his shield when he went to war. The magic finger would protect him.



How did he get his hands on the fingers? Did he go to the dead woman's family and say, 'Excuse me, would you mind if I cut up her body?'

No. They were Aztecs and Aztecs never do anything so polite or simple.

When warriors heard about a suitable corpse they would get together in a gang and ambush the funeral. (Of course there couldn't be more than ten in the gang – that would make sure that everyone got a finger!)