

EPISODE 1: SOMETHING OLDER THAN MEXICO

YVELIO:

Okay, I'm in front of the mic yeah. Can you hear? Great, all clear? Are we- Are we doing the tragic backstory thing, still? Yeah? No I'm still up for it but uh- I'm not doing it sober. Cuz I don't fucking want to. If I have to bring all these memories back up I... I just don't want to feel it. So what is that, Vodka?... Yeah, screw it, do you have a shot glass? It's just nicer that way. No? What kind of recording studio is this? (Laugh.) Thank you! Okay, I'm ready, I'm ready.

So for those of you who don't know me, my name is Elio, Elio Lorès. I was born in a small village named Azcatla, in Mexico twenty-three years ago. And... Well there are three things you need to know about Azcatla.

First, that its founders meant to name it after the Nahuatl word for grassland. But since the church had made sure to burn every record of that language, and crucified those who remembered it, my ancestors had to throw a bunch of syllables together from memory and- I found out that they actually came very close in their attempt.

Second, Azcatla was small. And I'm talking less than a hundred people, but I don't think it would have stayed that way because people were churning out babies all. The. Time. You had nothing else to do. You just made more people and hoped one of them would do make something cool, eventually. It was, so small that it remained one of the last place on earth where people still honored one of

the old faiths. We would shroud ourselves in the darkness of their cellars, and prayed in whispers to a dark-haired woman in a crimson dress. It was very dramatic.

Among the gods of men she was one of the youngest. She was- a bastard of the Aztec and Christian pantheon, born during colonization. She wore a crown of roses and weaved thornes in her hair, she had the the softest smile, but hid herself behind a mask, a cracked skull she would paint on her face.

And like most of the gods of today, she had disappeared many years ago, after the Old Man in the Sky had sent his followers on another crusade.

And now the third and last thing you need to know about Azcatla, and I'm sure y'all saw it coming... Is that it burned to the ground.

(FIRE, CRIES)

For He, the Lord, is everywhere and sees everything. And he never liked false idols.

And tonight, as the village burn, only two survivors escape. Me, and, dragging me away from the village, my Father. Because I just stood there. Staring at the streets, the bodies litter the ground. Farmers, merchants, men, woman and children, all of them dead. Friends. Family. And looming over the carnage I saw 4 crusaders in the middle of the plaza, watching a wooden stake as it burned..

They were... titans. Armed from head to toe, rifle in hands and swords on their back. A white cross emblazoned on their kevlar vests.

Behind them, I heard someone ask about runaways and the 4 of them turned at once, facing the inquisitor that lead them. The man was tall, and joyful. He strolled around like on a midnight walk and they told him yes sir, two runaways going east.

He smiled and he said "But not for long". And they returned his smile said "No sir, not for long". Amused, you know, it was like Saturday night with the boys I guess for them, it was fun. Exciting, thrilling. I don't know. Less than a mile away, we're running for our lives, trying to survive... I mean, my father was!

I was trying to get out of his grasp, to go back, to try and do something... I kept saying you have to let me go, Mom is still here! For the first time he turned around and he grabbed me by the collar and he said "She's dead. You see that fire, you see what they were building? She's dead!"

And I protest, It doesn't make sense to me, she wasn't a witch! Why would they-

(Gunshot)

And they start shooting. So I crouch down, my father grabs me again and, he says "Hurry!".

Far behind us, one of the soldiers lines up his visor and...

(GUNSHOT)

... Shoots. The bullet pierces my Father's flank. He falls to the ground, breathless, as I crouch down next to him. I try to get him up but he says no you gotta run. Again, I try to help and I say come on you gotta get up, we gotta go." And he just says "Run, now." And I hesitate. I hesitate because I'm terrified and I know he's not gonna go far and... I don't see any tears in his eyes. Just... Rage. And he says: "Goddess protects you Elio."

And then he's shot in the head.

...Can we take a break? Just for a minute, that'd be great. Yeah do you have a lighter? I'll be right back just 5 minutes.

...

...Okay, where was I. Right, so, I jump back, finally get back to my senses as well, and I start running. I run for miles and miles and- I know that behind they're taking their times, they know they'll find me so... Sharing jokes, they wanna make it last. It's the last kill of the night I'm sure it means something. So I keep on, praying with every step forward, with every breathe I can still waste I say:

"Goddess... Give me strength. Let me take one more step. I will fight for you... I will offer them all to you, but please Goddess give me strength."

(PANTING, STEPS)

I fall to the ground, once, and I get up. Twice, and I get up. And you wouldn't believe the amount of STUFF, on the ground in a random field in Mexico. Bullets are grazing my skin, my arms and legs are bleeding, my face covered in ash, but still I run.

Until I stumble again. On something older than Mexico. A stone brick. The entrance of forgotten ruins. I look up and...

(IGNITION)

And a brasero ignites in front of me, piercing the night. Another follows, and another, then dozens more. And with their light I can see a whole city emerging from the night.

And that's where it gets fun.

That city was not even a tenth of what it used to be, but some buildings still stand. And at the end of a paved route, the braseros reveal the path to a pyramid.

And I knew something answered my call.

I saw a red figure on the road. A dark haired-woman in a crimson dress, draped in the mist.

She was right in front of me and suddenly she was gone... Only to reappears further away. She wanted me to follow. To the pyramid.

I start running again. I go deeper into the ruins and a few minutes after, I can hear the soldiers enter and... They don't know what this place is. They ask "Where are we?" and "Do you seem him?"... Suddenly one of them spots me. I am painfully climbing up the steps of the pyramid, barely halfway.

They start shooting but I'm way out of range and the night is too dark so they'll have to go deeper. And as they do... whispers start to rise.

(WIND. VOICES.)

- *Kill him...*
- *Kill him.*
- *Slowly.*
- *Draw your blade.*
- *Make it last.*
- *Make it an honorable kill.*

In the beginning they can't quite hear them. They keep shooting and one of them actually manage to hit me in the shoulder . I fell against the steps. I heard them cheer behind me, high on adrenaline. But they still didn't pay attention to the

voices. To the single idea it was slithering inside their mind. Most importantly they didn't realize it was a women's voice, whispering in their ears. So when another soldier tries to shoot, the inquisitor puts a hand on his shoulder to stop him. The man takes out his sword and starts climbing the steps.

Meanwhile! The inquisitor is gonna have to walk all the way to the top because I made it! And it's not glorious! I'm half dead, panting like a dog, bleeding away on sacred ground... I stumble away from the steps and recover on the edge of a weird altar. A table carved in dark stone, and I can feel it yearning for something, almost pulsating.

And on the other side I see her. La Catrina herself, ruler of the dead and protector of his people. And I can see behind her smile she hides so many worries, like me mom used to. And it's not reassuring you know, when you see a goddess and she's worried for YOU? Doesn't feel great. So I tell her:

- They're coming... Please goddess help me, you have to stop them!

And ever so gently, she takes my face between her hands.

- *Shh... It's gonna be okay mijo, breathe. Breathe. Now take the knife.*
- What ?

I looked down and I see a stone dagger on the table, untouched for centuries.

She repeats:

- *Take the knife.*

Meanwhile my head is getting heavier, my mind quieter. The air is too thick, too warm and yet I'm shivering. I'm loosing blood, loosing thoughts. I'm on the edge. And that's when I hear the footsteps. The inquisitor got to the top and he asked:

- Finished running?

I look up but La Catrina is looking past me. Wrath in her eyes. And it's like nothing I had seen before. I wasn't fiery rage, it was dark and composed. Slowly-thrust-a-dagger angry. And she tells me:

- *Quiet.*

The man was only a few steps away from me but I don't think he could see her... Only me, bleeding away at the altar. And then he said:

- It's a beautiful place to die.

And could you imagine if those were the last words you hear? If a psychopath in armor walked toward you and said "Hey, enjoy the view though."

I hear the sword raised in the air, I hear his hand around the handle, and I hear his voice whispering last rites already. You know the latin stuff:

- Pater noster qui es in caelis...

And he takes one last step. And La Catrina says:

- *Now.*

And it's like she just pulled every ounce of focus within me, my entire soul right back into my body. Before the inquisitor can react, I slip under his sword and throws him against the table. The daggers find a heart. And blood soaks the altar.

(MUSIC. CLAMOR.)

La Catrina lifts her arms to the side, embracing the sky. I look up at her, insanity in my voice and I say:

- This is for you... Goddess.

And that night I knew. I resurrected a God.

Crimson mists started to rise from the sacrificed body, swirling around the altar.

The goddess starts faded away, fusing with the haze. I took a step back because – It was kinda, fucking scary- as the mist launches at me, raising me in the air.

Everything around me felt, silent, for the first time my soul could be still. And I gave control without even thinking about it. It was like an adult suddenly took my hand after 23 years of struggle and said “I got it. Just rest for a bit. That’s what they don’t tell you about possession it’s not a struggle.

It’s somebody saying they’ll land you a hand and, your poor desperate soul, your anxious, overwhelmed mind is just begging you to let them. And only then do you realize how tired you are inside. And she knew her way around a body much better than I ever could. I had one for 23 years, she had hundreds across centuries, she knew exactly what she was doing.

Meanwhile the rest of the soldiers only now reach the top of the pyramid and they stop dead in their track.

They saw the mist carves symbols on my skin, it was Calavaeras and thorny roses, weaved together with Aztec symbols. And that, that was painful. That was her carving herself a place within me, infusing with me power and... I thought that was it. I thought I had accomplished some divine purpose and now, that fire spreading within me would consume me.

I thought I was gone.

I slowly started my descent, my eyes closed but a new grace to my movements. A lightness. And in my mind this perfect stillness. Like being in the backseat and watching someone drive. Knowing that everything was gonna be alright. My body slowly turned around, like moved by the breeze. I opened my eyes as we faced the soldiers. And obviously they started shooting but not once did I feel worried.

(GUNSHOTS)

And all of the sudden a sphere, deploys itself around me. A shield, almost invisible if it weren't for the veins that ran through it. Pulsating in echo with my own heartbeat. And I looked at its swirls, on the surface, its texture. I realized it was blood. The priest's blood, surrounding me, protecting me.

With each impact, a small burst of it spread in the air, spreading the iron scent into the night. Soon enough the bullet rain stops. The guns click empty. And I took a single step forward. I didn't have to think, it was instinct, you don't think about breathing. You don't think about this either. The shield suddenly expands, throwing the rest of the soldiers down the pyramid, hundreds of feet down. They were dead on impact.

Silence came crashing down the ruins. I looked down at my own arms, the new symbols marking my skin, and I heard a voice in my head say

- *You are the last of our kind, mijo. And if we are to survive, we must find allies.*
- Where should I go ?
- *West, to europe. Where the church has been driven off, centuries ago.*
- By who ? (Because who could face the church?)
- *The witches of the old world are powerful, my son. They predate the Old Man in the Sky by millenias, and when the church tried to wage war against them, they crushed his soldiers. To this day they guard the old continent, making sure no faith ever takes hold in their kingdom.*

And that's when I said:

- Well that doesn't sound like a good plan because I'm pretty sure you're a goddess.

She said it wasn't ideal, but at least we'd be able to hide, and find others. I asked:

- Others ?

My eyes swept across the peninsula and I took it all in. The summer breeze washing over me, gently playing with my hair. The smell. For years to come, this would be how sadness would wrap around me. And for that I'm grateful. I'm grateful this is what I took with me and not the fire, not the screams. Like the last whispers of the winds through a sea of grass. Like a summer night with an iron smell. Then I asked :

- How will I cross the sea ?
- *Like every men before you.*

Me, being pragmatic, I asked:

- Do you mean by boat.
- *No. It's a path. Many gods still remain in this world, and their servants resemble you. Over centuries they've paved their own roads to navigate the world, hidden away from the Church. Those paths still exist, for those who know how to ask. It's people. And they'll find you. They follow the church's inquisitions in search of survivors, always-*

We are bound together, but she cannot reach me from outside our lands. Her blessing follows but she said it would never be as strong than within our cities.

And I asked why not. She said: Because you're the only one left. That dozens had prayed for her that night, with their very last breathe. They gave her...

Everything. Faith is all that keeps her anchored to this world but for her to grow in power she'll need follower. And that's why I crossed the sea. That's how I met the rest of you guys.

OUTRO:

Thank you so much for listening to our Pilot! If you'd like to know more about the show (Behind the scenes, Fan art, release schedules etc...) Give us a follow on Twitter, @Desperado_radio!

Stay safe!