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Opening extract from

Aztec Attack

Written by

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CHAPTER 1

KICK-OFF

Tom was trying hard to keep a football in the air with his feet. The final of the five-a-side tournament was due to start soon. His Townbridge team-mates were warming up, taking turns to strike practice shots at the goal. At the other end of the pitch, their Riverside School opponents were doing stretching exercises in front of their coach.

As Tom flicked the ball into the air, Zuma watched him curiously. Her face was painted

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blue, and her feathered headdress and white robes fluttered in the breeze. Zuma would have been a strange sight at a school football match. However, only Tom could see the slave girl, and Chilli her little Chihuahua, who was scampering around, yapping excitedly.

Zuma folded her arms. "This is a silly game," she said. "The Aztec game of Ulama is much better. The goal is smaller – just a stone hoop instead of that great big net. Plus the players use their hips to knock the ball around. It's very skilful. Why do you use your feet?"

Tom glanced at her. "It is called *foot*ball," he said. "The clue's in the name." Distracted, he lost control of the ball. He sighed as it bounced across the pitch, with Chilli chasing after it.

"Are you sure you should be on the

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team?" Zuma asked. "You're not very good at keeping the ball in the air."

"I was doing fine until you interrupted," Tom said. He jogged over and rescued the football from Chilli, who was sniffing it suspiciously.

"Tom!" Two voices were calling out his name from the sidelines. He turned to see his mum and dad waving at him.

"Good luck!" Mum shouted, clapping.

"Townbridge for the cup!" added his dad.

Tom waved back, giving his parents the thumbs up.

"Er, Tom?" Zuma called out. "The rest of your team is talking to that bald man."

Tom looked across. His team-mates had gone into a huddle round Mr Simmons, the coach. The match was about to start. "Uh-oh!" he said. "Better go."

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As Tom walked away, Zuma ran over to the football he had left behind. Pulling back her foot, she kicked it as hard as she could across the pitch. Tom's eyes widened as he watched the ball sail through the air.



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Smack! It hit Mr Simmons right on the back of his head.

The coach whirled round. "Tom Sullivan!" he shouted. "What do you think you're playing at?"



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"It wa—" Tom started to say. Then he stopped. He could hardly tell the coach an invisible Aztec slave girl had kicked the ball... He looked down at his feet, his face burning with shame. "Sorry, Mr Simmons," he said. "It was an accident."

"I can't believe you're messing around now," said the coach. "As you can't take the game seriously, you can sit on the substitute's bench." He pointed to a bench next to the pitch.

Tom's face went even redder – how could this happen in front of his mum and dad? He nodded miserably and walked off the pitch. Zuma and Chilli trailed after him.

"I'm sorry, Tom," said Zuma. "I never meant to hit him, I promise."

Tom sat down and folded his arms, ignoring her. He watched as the two teams

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took their positions. A strong gust of wind had started up, whipping across the pitch. The referee blew his whistle and the match kicked off.

Immediately, Riverside went on the attack. But Tom wasn't watching the game. He was looking up at the sky, which was suddenly filled with dark storm clouds. Fat raindrops splattered on his head. Chilli growled.

"Oh no!" groaned the boy sitting next to Tom. "Rain! You know what that means. The pitch is going to get muddy."

But Tom knew what it *really* meant – Tlaloc, the Aztec rain god, was on his way. Since the day Tom had accidentally released Zuma and Chilli from the drum in his dad's museum, the three of them had been travelling through time, searching for

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six golden coins that Tlaloc had scattered through history. Now only one coin remained. If they found it, Zuma would win back her former life, and her freedom.

There was a loud "Oooh!" from the crowd as one of the Riverside players hit the post.

But Tom wasn't paying attention to the action on the pitch. He was watching Tlaloc's face appear in the storm clouds above. It wasn't a pretty sight. Two bulging eyes stared out from beneath a feathered headdress. Tlaloc opened his mouth to speak, revealing two rows of sharp, pointed teeth.

"Tremble, mortals!" Tlaloc's thunderous voice shook the ground. "You may have found five of my coins, but your adventure ends here. You will never find the sixth."

"Oh yeah?" Zuma rose to her feet.

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