

The Eye

Beach, Village + Urban Living in Mexico

January 2024

Issue 134

FREE



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AMERICAN DRAGONS

POPOCATÉPETL AND FAMILY

THE LUNAR NEW YEAR:
CELEBRATING THE YEAR OF THE DRAGON



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FOR SALE

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HOT!
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FOR SALE

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Editor's Letter

“When our eyes are graced with wonder, the world reveals its wonders to us. There are people who see only dullness in the world and that is because their eyes have already been dulled. So much depends on how we look at things. The quality of our looking determines what we come to see.”

– John O'Donohue, *Beauty: The Invisible Embrace*

As we have done for the past many years, the theme of our January issue falls in line with the Chinese New Year which this year is The Year of the Dragon. This logic may seem a bit silly but was fine when we had year of the chicken, the pig and the ox, but dragons? “Dragons are for children’s stories”, I mused to myself, “a gateway animal to the study of dinosaurs and keeping snakes as pets.”

I was intrigued to see how our writers would navigate this theme and I was contemplating this as a majestic gold-colored iguana made it’s way across the road.

The truth is that fairy tales and mythological creatures are born from something real. The iguana with its golden tail swinging from side to side, the jagged edges of soft spine that run from the head down to the tail and the long thin toes with protruding claws, is fantastical. If we look at every day things with new eyes, we realize that our world is as full of wonder and magic as any fairy tale or Harry Potter book. The world we live in is full of many beasts and creatures and happenings that are wondrous.

As we slide into 2024, let us remember to look upon our world with wonderment. Be amazed by the night sky full of stars and the creeping awakening of the morning light. Talk to insects and take a moment to see the way the vultures and pelicans dance through the air. Let your fingers caress the bark of a tree and think about all that the tree has been present for in its unmoving stillness. Magic is everywhere. One of the saddest things that happens as we grow up is that we are encouraged to move away from looking at the world in a whimsical way and yet it is looking at it in this way that joy is most readily available to us.

Let go of practical things that are weighing you down and allow yourself to be kissed by the breeze, at least for a little while.

See you next month,

Jane

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“Airbnb” RENTALS:

(by “Airbnb” we actually mean **Vacation Rentals** in general - now that we’re on the same page...)

THE WINS, THE CHALLENGES & THE UNFORESEEN

THE WINS:

Earnings & Experiences

Vacation rental earnings provide owners access to additional income that supports second home ownership. By staying in the heart of the community, guests are able to experience the true sense of a destination, like Huatulco. When you have a win-win like this, it's a beautiful thing! We live in a world where renting a private property for a vacation stay has become akin to staying at a resort/hotel. Private home rentals are often a better & more personalized travel experience for many guests. For property owners, it can be the lifeline to vacation home ownership, especially when you find the right Management Company to support a successful program.

THE CHALLENGES:

The Cashflow Equation

While the wins are enticing, making the numbers work & knowing how to find that perfect balance between earnings, property care, & cash flow can be a challenge. Owners often look for gray areas & shortcuts to save money. One of the most common ones is tax accountability. Homeowners earning rental income in Mexico are legally required to declare & remit income and sales tax in Mexico on all rentals. As of 2023, Federal and State governments have begun the process of auditing declared incomes against online property listings. **If a property is available for rent anywhere online** and is not currently following federal tax guidelines, that owner should be prepared for high risk exposure in 2024. It's important to work with experts who can help manage misinformation and ensure owners are compliant with regulatory requirements. If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. Do the due diligence!

THE UNFORESEEN:

Damage & Disputes

Taxes are predictable, but expect surprises associated with your hospitality venture. Inexperienced rental managers will be learning on the job, and the rental property will be their classroom. Trying to save a few percentage points on management fees while sacrificing professional hospitality, formal guest screening, vacation rental insurance, and accounting & legal support is a lot of risk for minimal savings. Rental performance alone, when dealing with an experienced manager, will typically cover the difference in fees. Independent market data shows Huatulco at an average annual occupancy rate of 34% to 48%. On average, My Huatulco Vacation exceeds these performance outcomes by up to 30%, while maintaining an all time guest satisfaction rating of 97.2%. The numbers speak for themselves.

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VACATION Est. 2008

American Dragons

By Brooke O'Connor

Dragons are known globally through myth, legends, and folklore. Sometimes they teach, sometimes they terrorize, but they always fascinate. Let's look at our local dragons and how they became part of Meso-American culture. There are many versions of their stories, and their identities and powers varied over time and according to which Meso-American culture was worshipping them.

Quetzalcóatl

Mesoamerica's most famous dragon is the feathered serpent god. Called Quetzalcóatl by the Toltecs, then the Aztecs, and then their successors the Nahuatl, the deity is called



Kulkulkán in the Yucatec Maya mythology and religion. The Quiché (also K'iche') Maya of Guatemala called their deity Gucumatz. The Huastecs of the Gulf Coast worshipped a wind god called Ehecatl; when they were taken over by the Aztecs in the 15th century, Ehecatl was united with Quetzalcóatl, who also ruled the wind. This revered god was prominent in Aztec art and folklore, manifesting in various artistic expressions.

There are multiple accounts regarding the birth of Quetzalcóatl. In one version, he was born to a virgin named Chimalman, who dreamed that Ometeotl (a binary god who was both husband and wife) appeared to her. Another story tells of Chimalman conceiving Quetzalcóatl by swallowing an emerald. A third narrative says that Mixcoatl (the god of hunting, war, and storms) shot Chimalman in the womb with an arrow. She stopped the arrow with her hand, and nine months later, she gave birth to a child named Quetzalcóatl. Lastly, a fourth story mentions Quetzalcóatl being born from Coatlicue (see below), who already had given birth to four hundred children who became the stars of the Milky Way; the association with Quetzalcóatl may come from her skirt of writhing snakes, or the story that she gave birth to Huitzilopochtli, god of sun and war, after being impregnated by a feather, or perhaps a ball of feathers.

Quetzalcóatl was a multi-faceted deity, and held dominion over many aspects of everyday life. He was revered as the Creator deity of the Morning and Stars, the guardian of craftsmen, a rain summoner, and a bringer of fire. Additionally, he imparted knowledge in the fine arts and is credited with the creation of the calendar.

Quetzalcóatl was the priest-king of Tula city in Hidalgo, where Mexico's most important indigenous civilizations were born. Unlike many other gods, he strongly opposed the idea of regular human sacrifices; in one tale, he was known for his great kindness by suggesting sacrifices of snakes, birds, and butterflies instead of humans. There is some disagreement on this – he is shown in the 16th-century *Codex Telleriano-Remensis* swallowing a human being.

Quetzalcóatl's reign was cut short when his vengeful brother Tezcatlipoca, god of war, night, and sorcery, used dark magic to banish him from Tula. One version says Tezcatlipoca inveigled him into committing drunken incest with his sister, Quetzalpétatl. Remorseful beyond measure, Quetzalcóatl left Tula and journeyed to the coast of the Atlantic Ocean, where he ultimately sacrificed himself on a pyre and transformed into the planet Venus. There are multiple versions of how Quetzalcóatl's life ended – another story says he departed on a raft made of snakes, sailing beyond the eastern horizon.

In Huatulco, it is said he was the deity that came to Santa Cruz Beach and taught the locals how to thrive long before the Spanish arrived.

For more see: Quetzalcóatl Meso-American God - Naked History. www.historynaked.com/quetzalcoatl-meso-american-god/.

Coatlicue

Coatlicue roughly translates as “she-of-the-serpent-skirt” because she wore a skirt (*icue*) of serpents (*cōātl*), and was accompanied by two dragons. She represented the duality of nature and sometimes wore a necklace with a heart, human hands, and claws. Coatlicue symbolized nature for the Aztecs and guided people through the process of rebirth; she was considered an earth goddess.



Coatlicue was also a symbol of maternal fertility. One day, the earth goddess was busy sweeping on top of Coatepec in what is now the state of Veracruz, also known as Snake Mountain, when a feather accidentally landed in her apron. In that very instant, she miraculously became pregnant with a son, whom she named Huitzilopochtli, a powerful deity associated with the sun and warfare. When she became pregnant with Huitzilopochtli, her older sons, Centzon and Huitznahua, gods of the southern stars, became angry and decided to wage war against their mother. However, Huitzilopochtli leaped out of the womb in total warrior regalia and slew his siblings before they had a chance to kill their mother. Huitzilopochtli became the patron god of the Mexica tribe and was later given the same deity status as Quetzalcóatl.

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Coatlicue is immortalized in statues with her head cut off and blood squirting out from her neck. This may be because of a myth about several female deities, including Coatlicue, who sacrificed themselves to put the sun in motion. Their selflessness effectively allowed time to continue, and they preserved the cosmos by offering their own lives.

For more see: www.khanacademy.org/humanities/art-america/early-cultures/aztec-mexica/a/coatlicue. To get to the article, close the Khan Academy donation page by clicking the 'x' in the upper right corner.

Chaac

Chaac is the Mayan god of thunder, lightning, and rain. His basic form is human; his "dragon-ness" comprises a lengthy crocodile-like snout that curls – when Chaac appears on temple ruins, the snout looks more like an elephant trunk. His snout and body are adorned with reptilian or fish-like scales; he has ears resembling a deer, sometimes adorned with a shell. He carries a mighty axe, known as the lightning ax, capable of conjuring lightning bolts.



Chaac was depicted in four different aspects. The Four Chaacs were positioned in cardinal directions, and each wore a color representing their direction. The Chaac in the East, where the sun rises, wore red. The Chaac in the North, at the mid-day zenith, wore white. The Chaac in the West, representing the sunset, wore black. Lastly, the Chaac in the South wore yellow. A fifth color, green, is associated with the center point. In 16th-century Yucatán, the Chaac in the East was known as Chac Xib Chaac, meaning "Red Man Chaac," with only the colors being different for the other three Chaacs.

As the rain-making deity, Chaac gained immense popularity among the Mayan gods. The Palace at the Kabah ruins in the state of Yucatán boasts a façade with an impressive collection of over two hundred masks depicting his face. Chaac enjoyed widespread worship among the Mayans, unlike other gods with limited cult centers. His name and reverence held particular significance during the crucial planting and harvesting seasons.

The Mayans believed that the god Chaac had a primary role in rain-making, but he also had dominion over all water sources. Chaac required a specific sacrifice to bring rain – the blood of royalty from the Earth. He had to shed his own blood to make it rain, and he believed in the "blood for blood principle."

This rainbringer held the key to survival for the Mayans. Their strong desire to appease him with blood not only reflected their desperate need for water and bountiful harvests but also their deep-rooted belief in the importance of sacrifice and renewal for sustaining life. In this intricate cycle, humans offered sacrifices to Chaac, while Chaac himself shed his blood to ensure the revival of crops, and each person was expected to sacrifice something of themselves for the good of the whole.

The Mayans' deep understanding of Chaac's influence on rainfall enabled them to create sophisticated irrigation systems and techniques for managing water. By building canals, reservoirs and using terracing methods, they effectively utilized Chaac's rain to support their agricultural activities.

Even today, modern Mayan communities deeply respect Chaac's role in agriculture and water. They continue to perform ceremonies and rituals to pay homage to Chaac, acknowledging his vital role in maintaining the cycles of life and fertility. He was considered responsible for the balance of ecosystems and reminded people of the delicate dance between all creations in nature, including humans.

For more see: www.oldworldgods.com/mayan/chaac-god-of-rain/.

Dragons, dragons everywhere

Dragons are widely associated with medieval-esque lore and fantasy fiction, but we see they have an essential role in shaping cultures centuries, if not millennia, before the Middle Ages. Renowned psychologist Carl Jung taught that dragons symbolized the cold-bloodedness in our subconsciousness. He said they personify the brutal fear and ancient power of raw, unfettered natural law from times long past. He believed we used dragons to represent the "old ways." He explains that as humans evolved, dragons became less emblematic as we took on more warm-blooded, gentler symbols. However, one has to ask, in the modern day, if dragons haven't found their way back into society, dressed in cozy sheep's clothing.

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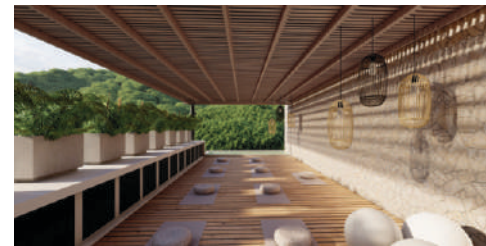


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The Taxi Industry in Huatulco

By Randy Jackson

One prominent feature on the streets of Huatulco is the abundance of taxis. Many, including both tourists and locals, rely on taxi service. At a casual glance, the diversity of colored cabs suggests numerous taxi companies. But how many companies exist, and how do taxi regulations and economic factors shape the industry in Huatulco? For the taxi curious of Huatulco, I have pulled together some information on the taxi industry here.

Taxis – a Public Service

Taxis throughout the world make up part of government-regulated public transportation networks. The importance of taxis is most critical in places like Mexico, where many people do not own their own vehicles. In Mexico overall, there are 391 private vehicles per 1,000 people (2022 data). By comparison, in the United States there are 908 private vehicles per 1,000 people, and in Canada that number is 790 per 1,000 people. In Huatulco, with poor rural communities alongside a tourism area, taxis are in great demand. According to the 2019 taxi registration list for the state of Oaxaca, there are 629 taxis within the municipality of Santa María Huatulco, the local governing body for the resort area of Huatulco. These taxis service the needs of a population of about 50,000-55,000 people.

The state of Oaxaca oversees taxis throughout the entire state, which includes 570 municipalities. In order to operate, each taxi requires a “concession,” good for five years, which can then be renewed. The concessions are usually owned by a taxi company, although any given taxi can be owned by the company or by the driver. Since 2013, the number of taxi concessions in Santa María Huatulco (629) has remained relatively constant.

Taxis in Huatulco

In Huatulco, the various cab colors signify different taxi companies. The names of these companies are prominently displayed on the front doors of each taxi. There are 19 distinct taxi companies within the municipality of Santa María Huatulco, with 16 servicing the tourist development (Bahías de Huatulco). The largest company, Sitio Santa Cruz, boasts a fleet of 74 taxis. *Sitio* in Spanish means “location” and precedes each taxi company's name, signifying specific pick-up areas assigned to that company. For example, each of the all-inclusive resorts in Tangolunda has its own sitio or company. There are also sitios for the different bays and residential areas such as Entrega, Arrocito, Chahue and Conejos.

These taxi companies maintain strict control over their territories. While any taxi can drop off or pick up passengers anywhere, only taxis designated for a specific area can park at that location. This territorial protection is observable in popular spots like the shopping center Chedraui or the main square at La Crucecita.

The Eye 10

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BAHÍA TANGOLUNDA	SANTA MARÍA HUATULCO	\$220
BAHÍA TANGOLUNDA	RESIDENCIAL BALCONES	\$50
BAHÍA TANGOLUNDA	U2-U2 NORTE-H3-UMAR-U2 B-AMPL. J	\$85
BAHÍA MAGUEY	AEROPUERTO	\$260
BAHÍA MAGUEY	PLAYA LA ENTREGA	\$60
BAHÍA MAGUEY	PLAYA ARROCITO	\$90
BAHÍA MAGUEY	BAHÍA CONEJOS	\$100
BAHÍA MAGUEY	SECTOR 0	\$80
BAHÍA MAGUEY	BOCANA COPALITA	\$140
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PLAYA LA ENTREGA	U2-U2 NORTE-H3-UMAR-U2 B-AMPL. J	\$75
SECTOR U2	SECTOR 0	\$45
SECTOR U2	SECTOR H3	\$45
SECTOR H3	U2-U2 NORTE-U2 B-AMPL. J	\$45

NOTA: EL COSTO DE LA TARIFA AUTORIZADA ES POR SERVICIO

Taxi Fares

Taxi fares in Huatulco are regulated by the state of Oaxaca. There are variations in fares in different municipalities of the state as a result of the government applying certain socio-economic factors (affordability). As of January 2024, the taxi fares have not changed since 2019. According to José Alfredo Cruz Acevedo, former president of Sitio Santa Cruz, there are no new fare changes scheduled.

The Economics of Taxis in Huatulco

Taxi companies in Huatulco operate as civil associations, the designation for non-profit organizations. These associations, owned jointly by the concession holders and the drivers, charge drivers a daily fee for dispatch and operational services. The profit in the taxi industry is thus derived from two sources: the concession owners and the drivers.

Monthly Fixed-Cost Items	Approximate cost (in pesos)
Taxi concession	\$4,500
State taxi tax	208
Insurance	250
Dispatch service fee	900
Vehicle maintenance*	800
Car loan payment	6,000
Total monthly fixed costs	\$12,658

* Oil changes, maintenance for tires and brakes

For taxi drivers in Huatulco, the economics vary. The table above shows the approximate monthly fixed costs – i.e., not including gas – for a driver who owns their own vehicle.

The fixed costs amount to \$422 MXN per day. Adding one tank of gas per day at current rates would bring the total daily cost to approximately \$1,322 MXN. This amount, before the taxi driver earns any income, is equivalent to the fare for 38 local trips (at \$35 MXN each). Taxi drivers often work long hours to earn a living wage beyond the costs of running and maintaining a taxi.

The primary source of profit in the taxi industry appears to be the ownership of taxi concessions (the right to operate a taxi) and renting that right to taxi drivers. There is no public market for taxi concessions and they are rarely sold. The rumored price for a concession is in the hundreds of thousands of pesos. However, the value of a concession can be estimated using the approximate monthly amount paid by a taxi driver for a concession, about \$4,500 MXN. Through a calculation resembling reverse engineering, e.g., when you figure out the present value of an annuity, the value of a 20-year taxi concession is roughly \$500,000 MXN (\$29,000 USD).

In conclusion, understanding the taxi industry's importance to Huatulco involves recognizing that around 600 to 700 local families depend, at least in part, on this industry to meet their basic needs. Recognizing the challenges faced by taxi drivers in earning a living wage is essential for those of us who regularly use taxi services. A small tip on each taxi ride can be a meaningful contribution to support these hardworking taxistas.

For contact or comment, Email: box95jackson@gmail.com.



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The Thrill of Anticipation – 2024: Ten Books Guaranteed to Quench your Literary Thirst

By Carole Reedy

If, like Julian Barnes and Gustave Flaubert, you believe that anticipation is the greatest form of pleasure, then (like me) you love looking forward to the new year's forthcoming selection of novels and non-fiction, when we meet new authors and continue to treasure our trusted favorites. To whet your literary appetite, here are ten new books ready for publication in the first six months of 2024.

January

***The Promised Party: Kahlo, Basquiat and Me*, by Jennifer Clement**

Clement, former president of Pen International, is especially familiar to expats and dual citizens in Mexico. Clement was born in the US but has lived between the US and Mexico during different life stages, as many of us have.



The latest novel from this highly respected international figure reflects the cultures of the grand old Mexico City of the 1970s – filled with artists and communists – and the equally scintillating New York of the 1980s, where Clement rubbed elbows with the likes of Jean Basquiat and William Burroughs.

In Mexico, Clement lived next door to the *Casa Azul*, the blue house lived in by Frida Kahlo, the iconic figure of the bohemian neighborhood of Coyoacán. From there Clement moved to New York. This is her memoir of the two majestic cities.

Clement has captivated us in the past with a disturbing young girl's story of Mexico in *Prayers for the Stolen* (2012, film version 2021), as well as in the New York saga of the *Widow Basquiat: A Love Story* (2014).

February

***Wandering Stars*, by Tommy Orange**

Avid readers discovered a new voice in 2018 when Orange wrote his well-regarded and eye-opening novel, *There There*.

As a young man, Orange played roller hockey at the national level for ten years. He was also a musician, receiving his bachelor's degree in sound arts. His passion for reading, and thus writing, evolved when he began working at Greywolf Books in California, but the idea to tell stories about his Native American heritage grew out of his work at a digital storytelling sound booth and at a story center at the University of California at Berkeley.

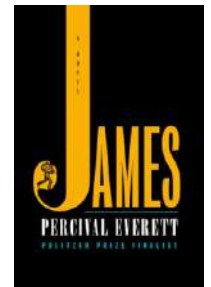


Orange's newest novel continues relating the history and stories of the Native American community. *Wandering Stars* traces the legacies of the Sand Creek Massacre of 1864 through three generations of a family, and includes some of the characters we met in his debut novel.

March

***James*, by Percival Everett**

Move over Barbara Kingsolver, author of blockbuster *Demon Copperhead* (2022), the successful takeoff of Dickens' beloved *David Copperfield*. Now with his latest novel, *James*, Percival Everett has turned Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) topsy turvy.



We reveled in Huck's and Jim's adventures in that classic novel, but this time the story is told by Jim, the slave's point of view replacing Huck's entertaining vision. Action-filled as well as humorous, any lover of literature will be delighted by this innovative work by a prestigious figure of modern literature.

Everett is the author of *Dr. No: A Novel* (2022), finalist for two awards – NBCC Award for Fiction, PEN/Jean Stein Book Award; *The Trees: A Novel* (2021), finalist for five book awards, including the Booker Prize, and winner of the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award; and *Telephone: A Novel* (2004), finalist for the Pulitzer Prize.

***Anita de Monte Laughs Last*, by Xóchitl Gonzalez**

In the December 2023 issue of *The Eye*, I listed Xóchitl Gonzalez's brilliant novel *Olga Dies Dreaming* (2021) as one of my top-ten reads of the year.



Her latest novel offers a glimpse into the art world of two women, one present and one past. The rising artist Anita de Monte of the title is found dead in 1985 in New York City, where her death is the talk of the town. The event is forgotten for a while, but years later another young artist, Rachel, stumbles on the story, which proves to be similar to her own.

The storyline straddles the lives of both women with, I'm sure, the same intensity Gonzalez told the story of the Puerto Rican family in her first novel, *Olga Dies Dreaming*. If so, it also should be memorable.

American Spirits, by Russell Banks

Russell Banks was an admired author of novels and short stories that address the social dilemmas and moral struggles of American society. The most popular of his many creations are *Rules of the Bone* (1995) and *Continental Drift* (1985).

He died early in 2023 of cancer before this latest collection was published.



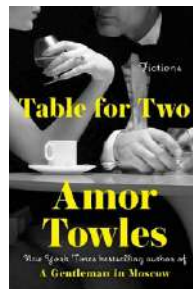
American Spirits consists of three novellas that take place in a rural American town, three dark stories about the comings and goings and undercurrents in our communities.

Writing in the *Journal of American Studies*, University of Nottingham Lecturer Anthony Hutchison argues that, “Aside from William Faulkner, it is difficult to think of a white twentieth-century American writer who has negotiated the issue of race in as sustained, unflinching and intelligent a fashion as Russell Banks.”

April

Table for Two, by Amor Towles

Towles' diversity is evident in his novels, from the entertaining romp that takes place in the United States, *The Lincoln Highway: A Novel* (2021), to the historical Russian tale of *A Gentleman in Moscow: A Novel* (2016).

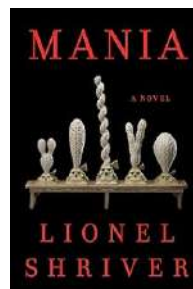


In his latest we are entertained by six short stories that take place at the turn of the millennium in New York City and a novella set in Los Angeles.

All of Towles' books prove to be best sellers, and I imagine the same for *Table for Two*.

Mania, by Lionel Shriver

We Need to Talk About Kevin (2003), Shriver's most memorable book and winner of the Orange Prize in 2005, was made into an equally popular film in 2011. Since then, Shriver has written many significant novels, my favorites being the recent *Should We Stay or Should We Go: A Novel* (2021), sorting through decisions surrounding dying with dignity, and *So Much for That: A Novel*, a rant on the American medical system.

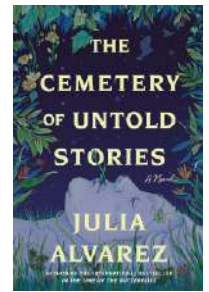


Shriver always entertains, with her sharp eye on society, so her newest book, which shows us a world filled with absolute equality of intelligence, is no surprise.

Her publisher writes: “With echoes of Philip Roth's *The Human Stain* [2000], told in Lionel Shriver's inimitable and iconoclastic voice, *Mania* is a sharp, acerbic, and ruthlessly funny book about the road to a delusional, self-destructive egalitarianism that our society is already on.”

The Cemetery of Untold Stories, by Julia Alvarez

Many of us remember Alvarez's most popular book, *In the Time of the Butterflies* (1994), selected by the National Endowment for the Arts for its Big Read program. In 2013 President Obama awarded Alvarez the National Medal of Arts in recognition of her extraordinary storytelling.



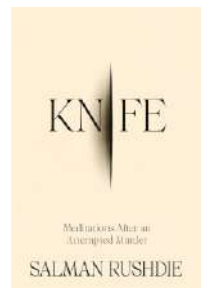
Alvarez left the Dominican Republic for the US when she was just 10, but she continues to write about the place she spent her youth.

Her newest is a tribute to books and storytelling. On a plot of inherited land, the protagonist buries her untold stories, only for their characters to return to tell their tales.

Books, stories, and magical realism: a satisfying buffet!

Knife: Meditations After an Attempted Murder, by Salman Rushdie

Salman Rushdie stands as an icon of bravery. Despite living through threats and a brutal physical attack on his life, he continues to exercise his freedom to write and entertain for a worldwide public.



Rushdie has survived a 20-year fatwa imposed by religious leader, revolutionary, and politician Ayatollah Khomeini, as well as a recent brutal knife attack that almost took his life. Since the attack, which left him blind in one eye and unable to use one hand, he has said he feels that until he writes about the incident, he will not be able to return to creating the marvelous fictions we so love.

In *Knife*, Rushdie recounts enduring the attack and surviving afterwards. By February 6, 2023, Rushdie had recovered enough to do an interview with *The New Yorker*, in which he said, “I’m lucky. What I really want to say is that my main overwhelming feeling is gratitude.”

The literary world hopes that this book will contribute to the spiritual healing Rushdie needs to continue creating his insightful, entertaining works of art.

June

Parade, by Rachel Cusk

Rachel Cusk's publisher describes her new novel, *Parade*, as one that “expands the notion of what a novel can be and do. She turns language upside down to show us our world as it really is.”



The main character, G, is an artist who has lived many lives, as many of us have.

Avid readers will remember Cusk's recent *Outline* trilogy: *Outline* (2014), *Transit* (2016), and *Kudos: A Novel* (2018). We look forward to Cusk's new creation, in which she tosses away the reins of perception in her writing.

There will be countless new books for this year's reading. On that happy note, enjoy these with the promise of more to come.

Popocatépetl and Family

By Julie Etra

With 38 volcanoes, a dozen of them active, Mexico still only has the eighth most volcanoes in the world. It's not the world leader in earthquakes, either. However, the mutual potential for volcanoes and earthquakes to cause disaster hangs over the country like a pall of smoke.



El Popo is geologically connected to Iztaccíhuatl, 12.9 km (8 miles) to the north through the *Paso de Cortés*; this is the high pass that Hernando Cortés and his men followed after their conquest of Cholula in 1519, on their way to conquer the capital of the Aztec/Mexica Empire, Tenochtitlán.

Mexico's Big Three Volcanoes

Popocatépetl, an active volcano, is the second highest peak in Mexico at an elevation of 5,393 m (17,694 ft), following the highest peak, Citlaltépetl (Pico de Orizaba) at an elevation 5,636 m (18,491 ft). It is affectionately known by its nickname "*El Popo*." Its name is derived from the Nahuatl *popōca*, meaning "it smokes" and *tepētl*, meaning "mountain" or "smoking mountain." Citlaltépetl is also derived from Nahuatl: *citlal* means "star" and of course *tepētl* = mountain. (There is a stationary store on Gardenia called Papeleria Citlalli, so now you know what it means.)



At an elevation 5,230 m (17,160 ft), **Iztaccíhuatl** is the third highest mountain in Mexico and occurs just north of El Popo. Its name means *white woman* in Nahuatl (*iztāc* = "white"; *cihuātl* = "woman"), since it resembles a woman lying on her back and is often snow-covered.

The three volcanoes are located to the east of Mexico City: Popocatépetl is about 70 km (43 miles) southeast of Mexico City, where the states of México, Morelos, and Puebla meet; on a clear day, it is easily seen from the city. Iztaccíhuatl is about 90 km (54 miles) from Mexico City. Pico de Orizaba, about 200 km (120 miles) from Mexico City, rises just west of the city of Orizaba at the border of the states of Puebla and Veracruz. Those who drive to Huatulco from the north easily see Popocatepetl and Iztaccíhuatl looking south from 150D; Pico de Orizaba is on your left as you leave the state of Puebla and enter Veracruz.

All three volcanos are steep-walled stratovolcanos, generally symmetrical and cone-shaped and with a 400 x 600 m wide crater. Stratovolcanoes are sometimes called composite volcanoes because of their composite layered structure, formed from successive eruptions (*strato* = layer in Latin). And all three occur along the Trans-Mexican volcanic belt, aka the Mexican "Ring of Fire," which stretches across central Mexico from the Pacific Ocean to the Gulf of Mexico – route 150D runs right through the middle of the volcanic belt.

The two volcanoes are protected as they lie in the Izta-Popo Zoquiapan National Park, which runs north and south within the Sierra Nevada range (*Sierra Nevada* means "snow covered" [*nevada*] "mountain range" [*sierra*]). On the west side of the range the watershed provides snow melt and creek water to the Valley of Mexico (formerly Lake Texcoco). Until relatively recently, the three volcanoes were the only instance of glaciation – they had year-round snow/ice cover – in Mexico; in the 1990s, however, both the *Glaciar Norte* and the *Glaciar del Ventorillo* of Popocatépetl began to retreat, due to both warming conditions and increased volcanism. Although ice remains in some places, Popocatépetl's glaciers were gone by 2001.

Popocatépetl is Mexico's most active volcano with 15 eruptions recorded since 1519. On May 20, 2023, both Mexico City airports (Benito Juárez Mexico City International Airport [MEX] and Felipe Angeles International Airport [NLU]) had to close temporarily due to increased volcanic activity and ash fall. Most recently, on November 1, 2023, the cone exploded with gray ash. This activity is not unusual, and in fact we stopped to watch it smoking on our way from Mexico City to Puebla a few years ago, with the sun setting behind it. Spectacular. Iztaccíhuatl is dormant and has not erupted since 1868. Pico de Orizaba last erupted in 1846.

Legends of the Mexican Volcanos

The Legend of Popocatépetl and Iztaccíhuatl. Legend has it that these two mountains represent a young warrior and a young princess. Once upon a time in Mexico (but after the rise of the Aztec empire), a beautiful Tlaxcalan maiden princess named Iztaccíhuatl fell in love with a young Tlaxcalan warrior, Popoca. (Tlaxcala is now a small state southeast of Mexico City.) She was the most beautiful princess who ever existed, and he was one of the most handsome and brave warriors of his village.

The Tlaxacans sided with the Spanish during the conquest of 1519-1521 in an effort to end the costly tributes they paid to the sprawling Aztec empire with its centralized, wealthy capital of Tenochtitlán (basically, Mexico City). Before departing for the ongoing wars with the powerful Aztecs, Popoca asked the *cacique* (chief) of the village for the hand of the princess. This was granted under the condition that the young man return safe and sound.

Popoca left for battle, presumably with the forces of Cortés, while the princess waited impatiently for his return. Meanwhile a jealous, poison-tongued rival, also in love with the princess, lied to her, fabricating a story of how her beloved had died in battle. Overcome by grief and inconsolable through this treacherous deceit, she died from a broken heart. A short time later, Popoca returned victoriously from battle ready to take the hand of his betrothed, only to find that she had died.

It is said that the young man, dejected, wandered through the streets for days and nights contemplating a way to honor their great love for each other. He decided to build her a large tomb under the Sun and compiled 10 hills to build an enormous mountain. Once built, he took the inert body of his beloved and laid her on the top of the mountain. As he knelt over her with a smoking torch in one hand, he kissed her one last time, watching her dream eternally.

Since then, they have remained together. Eventually snow covered their bodies, becoming the two snow-capped enormous volcanoes that will remain unchanged until the end of time. When the warrior Popoca, now the mountain Popocatepetl, remembers his beloved Iztaccihuatl, his heart, which maintains the fire of eternal passion, trembles, and his torch ignites again. That is why, even today, the Popocatepetl volcano continues to spew plumes of smoke from its fumaroles.

The Legend of Pico de Orizaba. At the peak of the Olmec civilization lived a beautiful and brave warrior named Nahuani. She was always seen in the company of her best friend, an eagle named Ahuilizapan (in Nahuatl, the “place of the happy waters,” pronunciation reduced to “Orizaba” in Spanish). Their friendship was legendary, and Ahuilizapan was always with her in battle. Finally, Nahuani died in battle and such was Ahuilizapan’s sadness and pain, the eagle flew as high as she could and plummeted back down to earth, where she eventually became a mountain and then a volcano. After many years of relative tranquility, Ahuilizapan remembered the moment she lost her best friend and began to spew lava. This is the reason that even now people climb this peak as high as they can, leaving offerings to keep the eagle calm.

Geology and a Brief Lesson in Plate Tectonics

Or, why the southern coast of Mexico is particularly prone to earthquakes.

The rigid outer shell of the planet, known as the **lithosphere**, is fractured into seven or eight major plates (depending on how they are defined) and many minor plates (“platelets”). Where the plates meet, their motion in relation to each other determines the type of **plate boundary**, known as **faults** and **fault zones**. They can move side by side, known as a **strike slip**, and under adjacent plates, called **subduction**, and in all kinds of combinations of movement. The relative movement of the plates typically ranges from zero to 10 cm annually. Faults result in earthquakes, volcanic activity, mountain-building, and oceanic trench formation. The Trans-Mexican volcanic belt and associated volcanoes result from the the Pacific Plate and the smaller Cocos Plate subducting beneath the North American Plate.

Oaxaca lies over the **convergent boundary** where the Cocos Plate is subducted beneath the North American Plate. The rate of convergence in this part of the boundary is 60 mm per year, or six times what is typical. This boundary is associated with many damaging earthquakes along the plate interface, within the descending Cocos slab, and within the overriding North American Plate

The frequency of earthquakes along the Pacific coast of Mexico is increased by geologic activity in the Middle American Trench, a submarine depression that runs from below Baja California in Mexico to Costa Rica. This oceanic trench is a major subduction zone, containing the Pacific, Cocos, and Nazca Plates on the ocean side and the North American and Caribbean Plates on the inland side. The trench is 2,750 km (1,700 miles) long and 6,669 m (21,880 feet) deep at its deepest point.

The Tehuantepec Ridge runs straight (an unusual configuration) across the Cocos Plate and under mainland Mexico near the Oaxaca-Chiapas border. The ridge is an old fracture zone, a place where plates stick; many shallow subduction angles result in perfect conditions for frequent, strong Oaxacan earthquakes. Indeed, Oaxaca has had over 14,000 earthquakes in or near the region since 1995; a quarter of all the earthquakes in Mexico occur in Oaxaca, and no, there is no homeowner's earthquake insurance that I know of.

Notable Mexican Earthquakes

Oaxacan earthquake of 1931. On January 14, 1931, a devastating earthquake with a magnitude of 7.8 struck the state capital, Oaxaca de Juárez. Oaxaca City was pretty isolated at the time, with only 35,000 inhabitants versus the current population of 300,050 (2014 census). The quake lasted about four minutes. Archives reported that 80% of the homes were destroyed, but a number of weaker tremors, or foreshocks, increasing in intensity, preceded the major quake, as opposed to aftershocks (*replicas* in Spanish). This tectonic warning allowed residents to flee their homes, resulting in only about 60 fatalities.

Mexico City earthquake of 1985 struck on September 19 at just after 7 a.m. with a magnitude of 8.0. (For reference, the strongest earthquake ever recorded was a magnitude 9.5; the Great Chilean Earthquake occurred in Valdivia, a town on the southern coast of Chile, on May 22, 1960.) The Mexico City seismic event caused serious damage to the Greater Mexico City urban area and at least 5,000 fatalities. A foreshock of magnitude 5.2 had occurred the prior May, the main quake was September 19, and there were two large aftershocks whose epicenters were in the Middle American Trench – more than 350 kilometers (220 mi) away.

The event caused between \$3 and \$5 billion USD in damage. Hundreds of buildings were destroyed and thousands more were seriously damaged. The degree of damage was due to the large magnitude of the quake, the size of the urbanized area, the lack of engineering in old structures, and the ancient, wave-amplifying lake bed on which Mexico City lies. This unstable substrate provides one of the ostensible reasons that President Andrés Manuel López Obrador halted construction of a new Mexico City airport in 2018).

Continued on page 16

Oaxacan earthquake of 2108. The hypocenter of this magnitude 7.2 earthquake was located 24.5 km (15 miles) deep, and the epicenter was about 37 km (23 miles) northeast of Pinotepa de Don Luis in northwest Oaxaca near the border with the state of Guerrero. (The hypocenter is where IN the earth the quake starts; the epicenter is ON the surface). The epicenter was in a rural area, with little reported damage to structures. A total of 14 people were killed as a result of a military helicopter crash surveying the damage, and not from the earthquake itself.

Oaxacan earthquake of 2020. The last big earthquake in Oaxaca occurred on June 23, 2020, with a magnitude of 7.5. The epicenter was between San Miguel del Puerto (north and west of Copalita) and the small village of Santa María Zapotitlán on the Isthmus. While it shook here in Huatulco, with over 200 replicas, it devastated the town of Juchitán de Zaragoza on the Isthmus of Tehautepec, where older structures were not engineered to withstand strong earthquakes. The quake was felt by an estimated 49 million people as far south as Guatemala, with some tremors felt as far away as 640 kilometers (400 mi). Thousands of houses in Oaxaca were damaged and ten fatalities were reported. A tsunami warning was issued for southern Mexico and as far south as Honduras, but the tsunami did not occur.

Mexican construction requirements have been strengthened to avoid earthquake damage. When we designed our house in Huatulco almost 15 years ago, the plans had to be approved by FONATUR in Mexico City, at the federal level, and withstand an 8.0 quake. That's a lot of rebar but we had no damage to the house other than a few superficial cracks.



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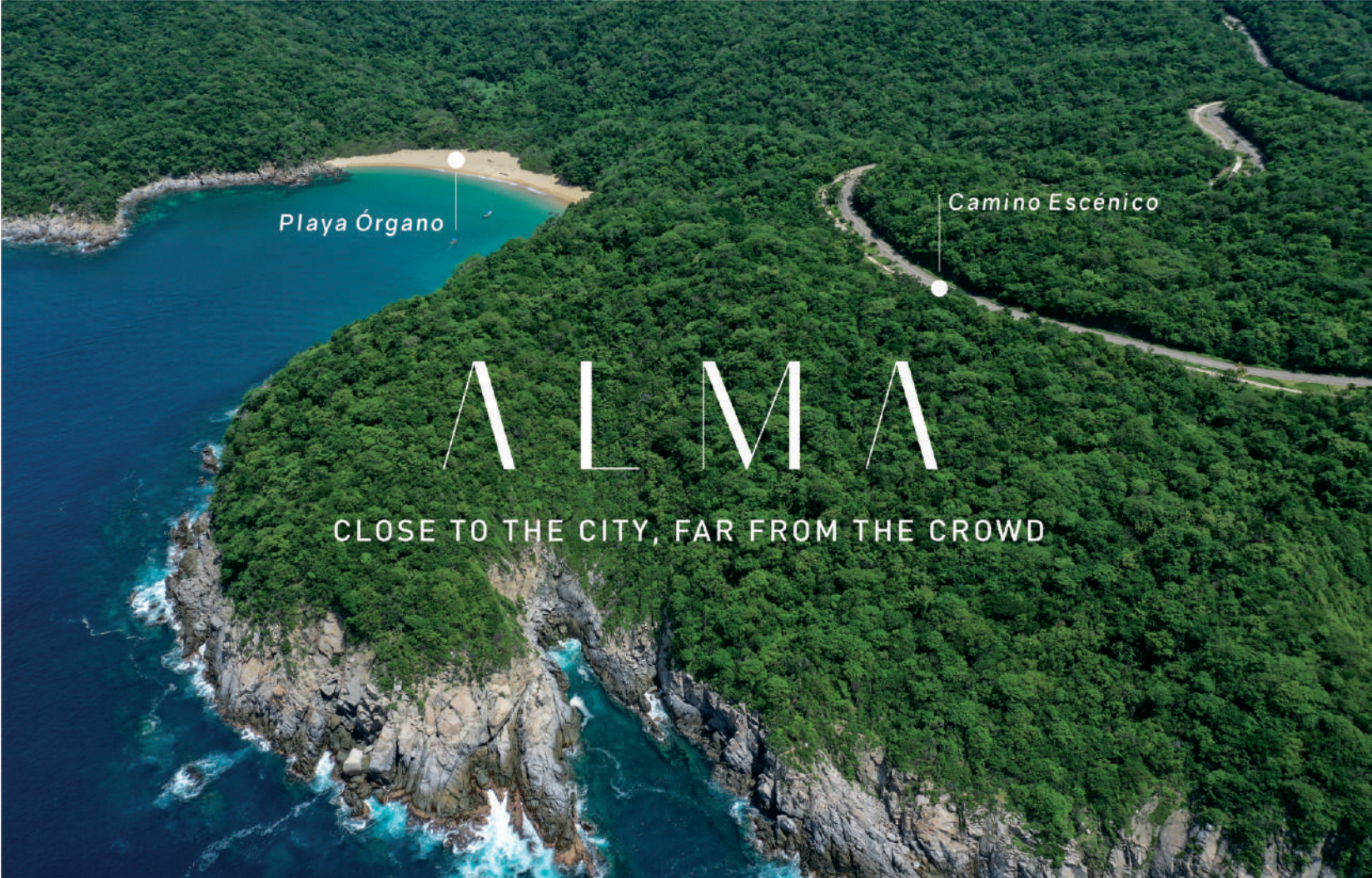
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Dragon Ladies

By Marcia Chaiken and Jan Chaiken

Dragons are among the most ubiquitous cross-cultural figures. They appear prominently in myths originating in virtually every part of the world. The belief in the existence of dragons was well established by the time the Chinese lunar calendar was created around 2600 BCE, incorporating the dragon as the only fictional animal in the cycle of years. One plausible hypothesis is that the universal awe of these creatures arose when humans began mining for metals and uncovered dinosaur bones; the dragon was born out of a need for explaining these phenomenal relics. With minor variations, cross-cultural graphic representations of these revered and feared creatures are very similar.

The Dragon Lady: A Very Different Origin

The dragon lady, a much newer concept unrelated to female mythological dragons, was initially a form of new world racial bigotry. The term was created by the media in the US around the end of the 19th century. Anti-Asian sentiment was endemic at that time, resulting in the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882), and the migration of many Chinese residents from the southwestern US to the border town of Mexicali, Baja California (see Van Hoewyk's article elsewhere in this issue). The New York-based Asian American Writers' Workshop credits (or perhaps discredits) *The New York Times* for first publicizing the term "Dragon Lady" in reporting about the Chinese Empress Tsu-Hsi (Cixi), who ruled from 1861 to 1908.

Dowager Empress Tsu-Hsi. Tsu-Hsi began as a royal prostitute serving the eighth Emperor of the Qing Dynasty, Xianfeng; after giving birth to his first and only son, she was officially elevated to concubine status. Xianfeng ruled from 1850 to 1861, when he died young at age 30. After the Emperor's death, he was succeeded by their son, who was five at the time; the Dowager Empress Tsu-Hsi thus wielded power in China from 1861-1908, although it was a checkered reign. Reportedly she was responsible for the death of eight ministers who were appointed as regents for the child, and then she had absolute control. She was described in *The New York Times* as "The wicked witch of the East, a reptilian dragon lady."

Others credit the term Dragon Lady to cartoonist Milton Caniff, who authored the comic strip **Terry and the Pirates**. Published in the *Chicago Tribune* for about four decades, beginning in the early 1930, it included a central character who was a Chinese woman pirate called "The Dragon Lady." The term took on the meaning of a Chinese woman who was wily and used her sexual allure to rise from obscurity to great power – but the term Dragon Ladies soon morphed to include any Asian women with those characteristics.

Madame Nhu. Perhaps the most famous Dragon Lady of the mid-20th century was Trần Lệ Xuân, aka Madame Nhu, the sister-in-law of Ngô Đình Diệm. As President of what was then South Vietnam, Diệm exercised the powers of a dictator from 1955 until 1963, when he died in a coup along with his brother and chief political advisor, Ngô Đình Nhu, Madame Nhu's husband. During Diệm's reign, Madame Nhu functioned as first lady and was herself elected to the National Assembly. Although she had converted from Buddhism to Catholicism to marry Nhu, she fought for reforms for women opposed by the Church, including divorce and the right to use birth-control. After the coup, she fled to Italy and remained there until her death at age 86, still being referred to as The Dragon Lady.

Non-Asian Dragon Ladies

It was not long before the term was applied to powerful women of other races. The politician who was a force to be reckoned with in the California Democratic Party, **Carmen Warschaw** (1917-2012), was called the Dragon Lady by other politicians in both parties. Warschaw was Jewish, so the term with roots in racial bigotry had nuances of antisemitism. Well-known within California for her philanthropy, especially to educational and medical institutions, she was the first woman to chair the California Fair Employment Practices Commission with the mission of fighting discrimination in housing and employment. She was named The Woman of the Year by the *Los Angeles Times* in 1976.

With the rise of feminism, and the entry of women into careers from which women were formerly excluded, the image of a Dragon Lady, a fiery powerful woman, began to have international appeal. In Mexico, one of the best-known women in World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) matches is **Lady Dragon** or **Lady Drago**; in her ten years of performing, the 4' 9" star has not revealed whether she was given another name when she was born. **Muna Shrestha**, from Nepal, also wrestles under the name of Lady Dragon. In the early 1990s, the American martial artist and actor **Cynthia Rothrock** was featured in a couple of films titled *Lady Dragon*.



And Last but Not Least!

Perhaps the best-known Dragon Lady in the 21st century is a fictional character in HBO's medieval fantasy drama *Game of Thrones*, **Daenerys Targaryen**, the mother of dragons (actually, it was three dragons that hatched from petrified dinosaur eggs). Based on the fantasy book series *A Song of Fire and Ice* by George R.R. Martin, the first of which is *A Game of Thrones* (1996), the series is viewed in 207 countries and territories. Adored by millions of fans, Daenerys filled the stereotype of the Dragon Lady, a beautiful woman rising from obscurity to achieve the ultimate in power. Well, almost. In the final episode, to the horror of people all over the world, Daenerys went mad and, with her dragon Drogon breathing fire, devastated whole cities and people – which may reset the meaning of the term Dragon Lady.



In spite of Daenerys' ignominious end, modern Asian-American women are reclaiming the appellation as meaning power with a socially approved implication. Some years ago, the book *Dragon Ladies: Asian American Feminists Breathe Fire* (1999), edited by Sonia Shah, presented writings of Asian-American feminists. The book has become an inspiration to many women who, rather than finding the accusation of being a dragon lady noxious, revel in the term Dragon Lady as recognizing their power and their ability to exercise their skills.

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Dragon Myths: Guides to Self-Discovery and Personal Growth

By Kary Vannice

According to the Chinese Zodiac, 2024 ushers in the Year of the Dragon. It is the only mythical creature to appear in the 12 signs. Dragons have long held a special place in the minds of humans. They transcend both time and culture, playing a pivotal role in ancient as well as modern myth and legend. The word dragon is even mentioned 21 times in the Holy Bible.

What Do Dragons “Mean”?

In Chinese culture, dragons symbolize benevolence, wisdom, and good fortune. But many other cultures have legends steeped in the myth and lore of dragons that are not always depicted so generously. In ancient Mesopotamia, Tiamat, a serpentine deity-monster, emerges from the sea, threatening creation with primordial chaos. In Scandinavia, Fafnir guards an unfathomable treasure with armored scales. And even here in Mexico, Quetzalcóatl, the feathered serpent god, symbolized the perpetual cycle of life, death, and rebirth (see O'Connor's article elsewhere in this issue).

The myth of the dragon can be found in teachings and legends from The Middle East to Japan, the Philippines, and West Africa.

Why do so many human myths and stories involve dragons?

Most experts agree that, at its core, this long-standing human fascination with these mythical creatures stems from a deep-seated need for meaning and a connection to the mysterious and extraordinary. With all its mystical qualities, the dragon is a symbol that transcends the ordinary. Often synonymous with cunning and transformation, the serpent, like a dragon, becomes a symbolic guide through the labyrinth of the human mind.

The famous psychologist Carl Jung theorized that the dragon embodies the archetype of the “shadow,” representing the hidden or concealed aspects of ourselves we find challenging to acknowledge. When humans confront the dragon in myth, it becomes a symbolic journey of facing one's inner fears, insecurities, and unresolved conflicts—the very essence of Joseph Campbell's Hero's Quest, summarized in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949). Campbell, much influenced by Jung, was a literature professor at Sarah Lawrence College in New York, specializing in comparative mythology.



In Jung's *The Symbolic Life: Miscellaneous Writings* (1957), Jung depicts the metaphorical journey of self-discovery through the story of a man trying to attain the dragon's treasure. Jung suggests that only those who confront and triumph over the dragon without succumbing to its allure can claim the “treasure hard to attain.” His exploration delves into the symbolism of this metaphor and likens it to unraveling the stages of inner confrontation, self-triumph, and the invaluable rewards of resilience.

Confronting Your Dragons

The mythological journey of confronting and triumphing over dragons mirrors the human experience of personal growth. Dragons, in essence, become symbolic mirrors reflecting our own fears and internal struggles. By facing and overcoming these mythical beasts in stories, humans can articulate their inner battles, embracing both struggle and vulnerability in the process.

The dragon's hoard, often a coveted treasure, metaphorically represents the rewards of personal development.

This hoard goes well beyond material wealth; it encompasses the intangible qualities of self-confidence, resilience, and inner strength acquired through the hero's journey of confronting and overcoming the dragon. In the words of Joseph Campbell, “The cave you fear to enter holds the treasure you seek.”

“Dragons,” dwelling in metaphorical caves of our psyche, represent the fears we must face in order to truly know ourselves and move forward on the path of life. The hero's journey, often prevalent in dragon myths, can be seen as a template for our own quests for meaning and self-discovery.

A study of various dragon myths from different cultures reveals a universal theme – an exploration of the human condition. Dragons, whether benevolent or sinister, become symbols for expressing our collective fears, hopes, and the constant human quest for self-realization.

In the exploration of dragons across cultures and the labyrinth of the human mind, a profound psychological connection emerges. Dragons are more than mythical creatures—they have become archetypal guides, inviting us to navigate the twists and turns of our own inner worlds. Confronting the dragon within the labyrinth of our own thoughts and feelings becomes a transformative journey, unraveling the mysteries of our human psyche so we can claim the invaluable treasure hidden within its depths.



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The Lunar New Year: Celebrating the Year of the Dragon

By Deborah Van Hoewyk

Having spent half a decade or so living in New York City's Chinatown, I came to think of Chinese New Year as a second chance at the whole resolutions-for-good thing. My dog, on the other hand, thought the fireworks were awful – when we went out early in the morning, the curbs were bordered six inches deep with fluffy blasted paper, and the air still smelled of sulfur. Better than the parades and fireworks, though, I was enamored of the zodiac signs that purported to shape the coming year.

The Year of the Dragon

And 2024 is the Year of the Dragon. It starts Saturday, February 10; the celebration begins on the eve (February 9) and runs through Saturday, February 24, ending with the Festival of Lanterns. (The dates on the true lunar calendar are a bit different.)

If you were BORN in a year of the dragon (this year and 2012, 2000, 1988, 1976, 1965, 1952, 1940, and every 12 years before that), you are intelligent, energetic, and generous, as well as outspoken and impatient, and a perfectionist to boot. But the atmosphere the Dragon brings to its year is for everyone – this year should present us all with possibilities for change and growth, progress and innovation.

Five elements cycle through the Chinese calendar – wood, fire, earth, metal and water; given the 12 signs and five elements, a complete cycle for the Chinese calendar takes 60 years. This year, the element of wood underlies the year of the Dragon, making it a year for growth, imagination, and enthusiasm.

Can you celebrate all this good fortune in Mexico? Yes, indeed! Chinese people, for various reasons at various times, settled in Baja California; the desert area of central Mexico called *El Bajío*, which covers all or parts of seven Mexican states; Guerrero; Mexico City; the Yucatán; and the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. The two best places to celebrate the Lunar New Year are Mexicali, the capital of Baja California, and Mexico City.



Baja California

If you go to Mexicali to celebrate Chinese New Year, the event starts with a parade from the *Kiosko Chino* (Chinese pagoda) in *Plaza de la Amistad* (Friendship Plaza) at the US-Mexican border. The Plaza, built in 1991, commemorates the sister-city relationship between Mexicali and Nanjing, China; the pagoda was donated to Mexicali by Nanjing in 1995, built by Chinese and Mexican artisans working together, and inaugurated on the Chinese New Year, February 1, 1995. The parade, replete with dragon and lion dancers, starts at the pagoda and goes south to Mexicali's Chinatown, known as *La Chinesca*.



The Chinese Presence in Mexicali: The Chinese, as they did in many other places, arrived in Mexicali at the turn of the 20th century to work. They were brought in by the Colorado River company to work on railroad and irrigation projects. Even more Chinese came to northwestern Mexico as part of the “cotton episode,” during which US-backed companies expanded cotton production into Mexico, creating a period of regional prosperity in the area around Mexicali. In 1903, there were 22 Chinese immigrants in the Mexicali Valley; in 1913, a thousand; in 1919, there were 17,000 and they seriously outnumbered the Mexican residents.



Chinese people had also moved west to the Mexicali Valley from the cotton-producing regions of Coahuila and Sonora to escape anti-Chinese sentiment; in mid-May 1911, a faction of Pancho Villa's revolutionary forces destroyed Chinese homes and businesses and killed over 300 Chinese in the Massacre of Torreón, Coahuila. (Remember that the US passed anti-

Chinese legislation [the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882], discriminated against the Chinese, drove them out of any number of towns, and in 1871, massacred 19 Chinese residents of Los Angeles, laying waste to LA's Chinatown.)

As time went on, more Chinese moved to Mexicali and opened businesses to serve the community; Mexicali and Tijuana host the largest Chinese populations in Mexico, with Tijuana's share at about 15,000 and Mexicali's over 10,000; through the 1940s, Mexicali was actually majority Chinese.

Chinese Contributions to Mexicali. Today, Chinese immigrants are considered major contributors to the area's social, economic and cultural development. There are over 300 (some say 1,000) Chinese restaurants in Mexicali; most serve Cantonese food, but adapted to Mexican tastes – “even the rice is different.” Apparently, it’s quite the thing to eat Cantonese food to celebrate the Day of the Virgin of Guadalupe (December 12).

One of the most interesting Chinese contributions is the La Chinesca neighborhood on the northern edge of Mexicali. Beneath La Chinesca is an area of tunnels, dwellings, and businesses that reaches under the border to Calexico in California. Although they were thought to have been dug to give the Chinese respite from intense heat, which badly affected them, the tunnels proved extremely popular during the Prohibition era in the US (1920-33), connecting the bars, restaurants, hotels, casinos, and bordellos of Mexicali with eager US customers. Excluded from the above-ground “Sin City” activities, the Chinese also excavated casinos, opium dens, distilleries, and bordellos. Chinese residents occupied housing carved out beside the tunnels until the 1970s; today, the connecting tunnels are mostly closed and the houses and businesses are accessed through trap doors in businesses above.

In 2022, Mexicali won the national prize for innovation in tourism in the cultural tourism category, awarded by the federal Secretariat of Tourism at its annual convention, the *Tianguis Turístico*. The prize was for a historical tour, “Origins and Secrets of La Chinesca,” developed and managed by Rubén “Junior” Hernández Chen, chairperson of the Committee for the Historic Center of Mexicali. (The earliest version of the tour, “La Chinesca,” also won the 2018 prize for diversification in cultural tourism.) You can find information (in Spanish) about the tour on their Facebook page www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100064772856377; the address is Callejon Reforma 306, and you can make a reservation by calling +52 686 150 3694.

Mexico City

If you go to CDMX to celebrate the Lunar New Year, you will have as exciting an experience as you might in Mexicali, but bigger! More and different events and, obviously, more people! But it will be different. The Chinese of Mexico City no longer live in the city's Chinatown, or *Barrio Chino*; Barrio Chino is very small, located in the *Centro Histórico* on a few blocks of Calle Dolores and its *callejones* (alleys); these streets are closed to cars. At times, the Chinese New Year celebration resembles a street fair, with plenty to eat and many souvenirs to buy; this year, there will be a plethora of golden dragons on the vendor tables.

The entrance to Barrio Chino is marked by an *Arco Chino* (Chinese Arch) in the *paifang* style – originally paifang architecture represented the organization of communities, but by now “paifang” has come to mean the gate of a community and is used only in decorative structures.

This being Mexico City, the Arch is not IN Barrio Chino, but on Santos Degollado Plaza immediately to the west (the Arch was too big to fit on Calle Dolores). Part of an ongoing effort to promote Chinatown as a tourist attraction, it was planned cooperatively with the Chinese Embassy. At the inauguration by then-mayor Marcelo Ebrard and Yen Heng-min, China's ambassador, Ebrard declared the Plaza to be part of Chinatown. A smaller arch was put up in 2018 to mark the actual entrance to Calle Dolores.

The Chinese in Mexico City – Phase 1: On October 8, 1565, after four months and eight days at sea, a Basque navigator-friar named Andrés de Urdaneta sailed into Acapulco from the Philippines, establishing the trade route from New Spain to Asia and back to New Spain. He had left from Barra de Navidad, Jalisco (south of Acapulco and north of Puerto Vallarta), on an expedition led by the explorer Miguel López de Legazpi, also from the Basque region; the expedition was intended to colonize the Philippines, which, along with Guam, the Mariana Islands, and parts of other islands off the coast of southeast Asia, was referred to as the Spanish East Indies.

The round trip had immense implications for New Spain, not just in terms of establishing global trade, but world influence as well, as the Spanish East Indies were mostly governed from New Spain. Immigration from Asia to New Spain began immediately. Those who came were mostly Chinese and Filipino, and practiced many trades, from musicians and scribes, to tailors and cobblers, to barbers and silversmiths. The city's *zocalo* (Plaza Mayor) hosted the *Parián*, an Asian market, where they sold their wares and goods imported from Asia.

This trade network, often called the “Manila Galleon,” included a thriving traffic in *esclavos chinos* (Chinese slaves), or *indios chinos* (equating them with indigenous Mexicans), although they hailed from various Asian countries. Goods brought into Acapulco were hauled overland by mule trains along the “China Road,” which ran up from Acapulco to Mexico City, the administrative center for tracking trade. Goods not intended for New Spain were loaded back on the mule trains and went on down the road to Veracruz for shipping to Europe.

The Manila Galleon lasted until early in the Mexican War of Independence (1810-21); Spain declared that the trade route should be eliminated in 1813, and trade ended in 1815, removing its benefits for New Spain.

The Chinese in Mexico City – Phase 2: In the early 20th century, the importation of workers to build railroads and other components of developing urbanization brought the Chinese to Mexico City as well. In 1901, there were only 40 Chinese listed in Mexico City, but by 1910, there were 1,482, many of whom moved from northern Mexico to escape the anti-Chinese (actually, the anti-foreign, or “nativist”) ideas of the Revolutionary forces (the Torreón massacre occurred in 1911).

The Chinese who came to Dolores Street were businesspeople, not construction workers. They opened restaurants, bakeries, laundries, and lard shops – lard was essential to both Chinese and Mexican cooking. Around 1930, when Mexico undertook an expulsion campaign to rid itself of Chinese immigrants, there were about 25,000 Chinese in the country as a whole; by 1940, there were fewer than 5,000.

Beginning shortly after this expulsion campaign, however, both deported Chinese and the Mexican government of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-40) made efforts to “repatriate” the deported, and to increase Chinese immigration in general. The 2020 census identified 10,547 Chinese immigrants in Mexico, nearly a 60% increase over 2010; this does not count Mexico's much larger Chinese-Mexican population, which goes back to the fact that early Chinese immigration was limited to men, who intermarried with Mexican women.

The history of Chinese immigration to Mexico, indeed to countries around the world, is complex and nuanced, involving racism and exploitation, resentment, often violent and deadly, of Chinese financial success, and – finally – an appreciation of Chinese culture and tradition. The Chinese New Year is perhaps the best occasion to do your own appreciating of that culture – have fun, and may your Year of the Dragon be especially rewarding!

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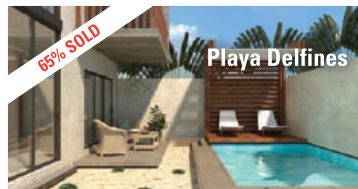
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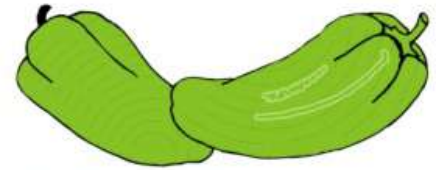
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