

## XILATANO: PROJECT 43

Gabriela Serrano

***Editor's Note:** Imagine my delight at receiving an entire sci fi novela as a response to the call for Chicana/Latina/Indigena young adult fiction! Gabriela Serrano's writing engages the promise of speculative fiction; it provides alternative perspectives to our current reality with fantastic characters and universes. Unfortunately, we could not print her entire novela. What you will find printed here is the Preface and Chapter 1 of Xilatano: Project 43. Additionally, I asked Gabriela to provide an overview of the project, printed below, to ground you in this highly imaginative setting. Enjoy!*

### **Overview of Project**

The political turmoil in Mexico following the brutal murders of hundreds of young women and men is the focus of this project. Through the lens of science fiction, reading audiences may remove themselves just enough to get an objective view of such acts of terror—specifically, the killing of hundreds of women in northern Mexico and the disappearance of 43 students from the Ayotzinapa Rural Teachers' College in Iguala, Guerrero—to determine how we are all connected to these human tragedies.

The project centers around the abduction of 43 students on their way to a political rally on September 26, 2014. To this day, these students remain missing, although one student's body has been identified. The mayor of Iguala Jose Luis Abarca and his wife Maria de los Angeles Pineda Piñeda are accused of ordering local authorities to abduct these students. To this day, the mayor and his wife have failed to take responsibility for the abduction of these students. Such tragic events are systemic. I have created a character

named Ajaw, which is a Mayan title for political rulers, to explore how the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), the ruling political party in Mexico for several decades now, has created what the people of Mexico are calling “the perfect dictatorship.”

To consider how such human injustices go unpunished in Mexico and are virtually unnoticed by Americans, I turn to Alien Theory and Afrofuturism to critically examine the systemic oppression of people of color and indigenous cultures in the United States and Mexico, respectively. Perceiving aliens as “others” can help uncover how those in positions of power alienate underrepresented groups. The relationship between Xilatonans—the alien race I have created for this project—and humans echoes the strained relationship between two neighboring countries: Mexico and the United States. Ideally, stories like this one may help to discard labels, such as illegal and legal immigrants, Mexicans, Americans, or Mexican-Americans, and recognize a shared humanity.

I also use feminism in this project as an important critical lens for addressing issues related to underrepresented groups, such as Mexican-Americans, indigenous cultures, women, and the LGBTQ+ community. I have created female protagonists, such as the Empress, Isa, and Etta, to reveal how we often overlook women as effective leaders in social and political revolutions. These characters are heavily influenced by the work of such female science-fiction writers as Octavia Butler, James Tiptree, Jr., Joanna Russ, and Ursula K. Le Guin.

On a more personal level, the book is also a result of personal losses I have experienced, as I have included my father, brother, and a good friend in this book in the characters of Inez and Beto. The exploration of spirituality and

the mysteries of the universe—what I call the Royal Sutra—is also a means to make sense of loss on a personal, global, and universal level. Such loss unites us in our common humanity, which I ultimately hope is the message I convey through my work.

### **Preface**

Open graves in the Chihuahua desert exposing the decomposing bodies of what the Council of 10 assumed were the bodies of hundreds of young women prompted some of the members of the council to take immediate action. There was nothing Xilatonans, or Xs, could do for these victims, but they still had time to save human lives.

Nearly two decades ago, two X fathers thought of their young daughters when they went on a covert mission to free a group of detained women just outside of Juarez, a major city in Mexico, a border town, the setting for this latest massacre of young people in Mexico. The killing of young people in Mexico was cruel, common, and was the distant responsibility of the Xs who had originally established a settlement on Earth near the Yucatan Peninsula during 700 AD Earth time.

The leader of the Xs, Etta Xiu, called an emergency meeting of the Council of 10 just two days before the aforementioned covert mission in the early 1990s. She wanted to stop Ajaw from murdering any more innocent young women, but disapproved of such missions as they could expose Xs on Earth. Etta was the leader of the Xs on Earth because she was the eldest of the royal line on this particular settlement and had developed the gift of foresight to such an extent, she could focus on the smallest life forms—an ant, a particle, even an atom—and sense its energy from across the universe. Such life energy flowed through every atom of the universe from one object, whether sentient or

not, to another. This energy would collect in both sentient and non-sentient objects, remain there for a given lifespan, return to the universe, and find itself yet another collection of energy—constantly renewing, constantly moving. Such was the nature of energy, of life, but the rest of the council did not foresee as Etta did. To them, human life was more than a collection of energy, as several of the Xs on Earth identified as human more than Xs.

The Xs had yet to capture and bring Ajaw, their former emperor, to justice, but they had managed to contain him within the confines of a particular area of the planet. The setting for Ajaw's cruelty was mostly in Mexico, but it had extended to South America as well. It was his empire of corruption from the time of the ancient Mayans to the slaughtering of young people in Mexico over the most recent decades. Ajaw would make the killing of young people in Mexico so ubiquitous, he nearly wiped out an entire generation. The people of Mexico were outraged. Some, like the Ejercito Zapatista de Liberacion nacional, or the EZLN, fought back, though Ajaw was successful in creating his empire of corruption by crushing the spirits of the people of Mexico. The families of young victims, such as the women slaughtered in the Chihuahua desert and young students abducted in Iguala, lost hope in ever recovering their loved ones; they went from declaring "hasta encontrarlos" to "nos encontraremos," meaning the only hope for the families of the young victims was that they would find their loved ones again in the afterlife.

Ajaw's rule over Mexico was violent, and the country had not prospered since the fall of the Mayan civilization, for which he was responsible. Random acts of violence made the people of Mexico fearful, and this made them easy to control. To assure his control, Ajaw had also created rampant poverty so that the people of Mexico had no way out economically. The more powerful Ajaw became, the more corrupt the Mexican government became. Ajaw

had infected all facets of the Mexican government and had risen to power, creating the perfect dictatorship.

### **Chapter 1**

Alberto “Beto” Canul quickly surveyed the image of 43 young men on a poster Emiliana “Emi” Cocom had posted on her Facebook wall of missing students in Iguala. He noticed the boys were about his age but did not give much thought about what could have happened to them before pressing the “like” button. Beto liked it because he liked almost all of Emi’s Facebook statuses, and if Emi had changed her background pic to this image of the 43 students, well, then this really meant she was fired up. Emi was Beto’s neighbor, lifelong friend, and, though he did not know yet, fellow Xs.

Inez, Beto’s father, walked in and seemed distracted. He did not notice his son sitting at the kitchen table. He grabbed his to-go coffee mug and filled it up.

“Want me to make some more, Dad? I made it extra strong since I got to the coffee maker before Mom did. She says we make motor oil, not coffee,” said Beto. Inez did not respond. “Dad! Earth to Dad!”

“What?” Inez looked up from his coffee mug and saw Beto sitting at the table. “Hey, stop squinting and put on your glasses when you’re staring at your manzana,” said Inez to Beto.

“You mean my iPad? Yeah, Dad, Apple makes it, but it’s called an iPad not a manzana,” said an annoyed Beto.

“Ay, ay con tu manzana. What are you squinting at anyway?”

His father stood behind Beto to see what his son was looking so intently at. Inez felt an overwhelming sense of terror when he saw Emi's post of the 43 missing students.

"Dad, don't be spying on me when I'm on Facebook," exclaimed Beto.

"I'm not spying, mijo. It's on Emi's wall?" asked a concerned Inez.

"Yeah, it's a post about the 43 students that are missing somewhere in middle of Mexico that Emi's so worked up about. Haven't you heard?"

"No," said his father hesitantly, "Your tía called late last night and said your Tío Chalo is in the hospital."

Rita was scratching at the glass door in the living room leading to the back yard, her barking a pealing pitch. Inez walked out of the kitchen before Beto could ask any more questions, as Rita gave him the perfect excuse for not going into many details about Tío Chalo. He knew he lied to his son to protect him, but that did not mean he liked doing it. He walked Rita outside to avoid lying anymore to his son.

Magdalena "Nena" Canul, Beto's mom, walked in to see her son intently reading something on his iPad.

"Hey, Mom. What's wrong with Tío Chalo? Is it his heart again? You want me to go with you? Are you and Dad going to Juarez? Are you staying over a few days? I could go with you. I wouldn't be missing anything at school, and what I do miss, I'll just ask Emi to help me with. I copy her notes all the time anyway."

“No, you know your Dad doesn’t like you going to Juarez. Besides, I need you to watch after my plants and Rita.”

“Just leave her with Emi.”

“Emi is always busy.”

“Oh, and I’m not?”

“I can see you’re really busy now, probably on Facebook, am I right?” She grabbed the iPad from her son’s hands.

“Hey, I’m reading that! Do you even know how to work my iPad? I’m surprised you even know what Facebook is. You’re like the only person on the planet who doesn’t have an account. Even Dad has one. All he ever posts about is barbecuing and nerdy engineering stuff.” Nena gave no response and clicked on the article Emi had posted:

*43 students are missing since yesterday from a rural teaching college in the town of Iguala. The students were on their way to a political rally. The police fired shots at three buses transporting the students.*

She scrolled down.

*Mayor of Iguala Jose Luis Abarca and his wife Maria de los Angeles Pineda refuse to talk to the press. Family members are demanding information regarding. . .*

Nena put down the iPad and said, “Don’t be reading about these things. Don’t you have a class to get to?”

Beto snapped his iPad back from his mom. “First, I need my iPad back so I can take some actual notes in my classes. You gonna drink the rest of the coffee?” Nena shook her head. “Ok, then I’m taking the rest of it with me to school. I’ve gotta stay awake through my boring classes today.” Beto poured the coffee left in the coffee maker in his to-go cup, grabbed his backpack, and walked out the door.

Nena waved goodbye to Beto then walked out to the back porch to find Inez sitting at their patio table with a look of concern. She sat next to him. “Any word from Etta?” she asked.

“No, just head-counts on council members who have arrived in Chiapas. You know her; she’s all about reporting facts and figures, never really giving us a sense of what the situation is in a moment of crisis besides the facts.”

“Inez, you’re already questioning her authority before you even get to Chiapas. She is a royal. She is our leader on Earth. She has to assess every situation based on what you call ‘facts and figures,’ and, most importantly, making final judgment calls based on her gift.”

“She never judges anything. She never acts. All she will do is control how much information the press gets a hold of, make sure she keeps the Zapatistas from defending their people, and a perfect job of diffusing the situation, as if nothing bad ever happened.”

“Inez, it is not our place, you know that.”

“Heck, it’s not even our planet, so why don’t we just all go back to Xilatano and let Ajaw take over Earth? I swear, just because our planet is near the



center of the universe doesn't mean we have to act like we're the center of the universe," said an increasingly-agitated Inez.

Beto and Emi's relationship, as of late, had become strained and Beto thought this was because Emi started to take herself too seriously since they started college at the University of Texas at El Paso. They were both born and raised in this border town, but their view of life on the border was much different. Beto argued that Emi did not need to worry about a country she didn't even live in, Mexico. "Beto, we have family there, our grandparents were born and raised there, we are Mexico," she said to him when he refused to join the Mexican American Student Association when she became president at the beginning of the semester.

Just looking at the landscape along this town helps to convey how Beto and Emi see the world differently, even if they were born and raised in the same town, went to the same school from kindergarten to college, and had been inseparable friends. When these two life-long friends started college at the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) just over a year ago, divisions arose that mirrored the artificial and natural barriers that divided the landscape around them.

Over the years, the demarcation between El Paso and Juarez—sister cities, as local people referred to these border towns—became more apparent with time. Before Emi and Beto were born, only the Rio Grande separated the cities. Emi's grandmother would tell her granddaughter that the tall, chain-linked fence she grew up looking at was not always there. Then one day, out of the blue, when Emi was still a small girl, giant, thick beams that seemed to scrape the sky and walled-off the view of Mexico became part of the artificial landscape that divided these two cities.

The Franklin Mountains divide El Paso into East and West. On the east side lived the “poor people,” as Beto would jokingly say to Emi. On the west side, where he and Emi lived, were the “rich people. Not like fresa rich, but American rich.”

“What’s that even supposed to mean?” Emi would ask sternly, no longer laughing at Beto’s off-hand remarks. Beto would often joke about the “beaners,” “front-Chis (which is the abbreviation of Frontera Chihuahua on the license plates of people living in Juarez), and “fresas” at their high school. But Beto’s jokes were no longer funny to Emi. Now, Emi often responded angrily. “These ‘fresas’ wake up at least two hours before school starts to wait in their cars on one of the bridges from Juarez to El Paso. Others leave their families in Mexico to live with relatives in El Paso during the week and go back on weekends to be with their families in Juarez. You have the privilege of not having to make these sacrifices, so it’s easy for you to look down at students from Juarez.” In high school, Beto and Emi did not have many friends from Mexico because of their respective cliques. Beto humorously referred to himself as a cool jock because he played football and Emi as a boring student council geek. Beto had not changed at all since high school, except that he played football for an intramural team on campus because he did not make the cut for the UTEP football team.

For example, just over a year ago, when Beto and Emi were walking on campus on the way to their first class on their first day of college, Beto said they were going to have to try to determine which of their new classmates were poor, which were rich, and which were fresas. It was then when Emi first asked, “What’s that even supposed to mean,” but with a deep tone of resentment. “I’m joking. Ok, I’m joking about poor Americans. It’s ok to talk to them but stay away from rich Mexicans.

“Yes, Beto, I get it, fresas are conceited, and they’re not even Americans, right?”

“Really, I’m trying to make fresa jokes, and you’re not having it?” asked Beto. “Come on, fresas are tools. Remember we hate them? You know, rich people from Juarez, or people pretending to be rich, but they’re not even American, so why are they so conceited?”

“Beto, you think like so many narrow-minded people. We do not hate Mexican, we do not hate American, and we are both Mexican and American, one and the same.”

“No—I’m a real American, so I don’t have to wear designer clothes and walk around campus like it’s a fashion show. Fresas can’t even pronounce the names of the designer clothes they wear, so they’re not fooling anyone.”

“Why are you so worked up about people from Mexico coming to get an education here, Beto?”

“I didn’t say that. I just don’t like the conceited ones coming over and pretending it’s their country.”

“I can’t even talk to you right now,” replied an angry Emi, as she abruptly turned and walked into the nearest building just to get away from him.

“Watch out for the Liberal Arts Building! That’s where all the strawberries hang out” yelled Beto as Emi walked away.

Inez walked into the house to find Nena picking up the mess they had made last night when they go the call from Chiapas from Etta about the emergency meeting.

“I found the suitcases in no time,” Nena said, “but it took me half the day to find your passport. Inez, please try to keep important things like your passport in your office.”

Inez grabbed some blueprints from the top of the dresser in their bedroom.

“You’re always leaving those things everywhere. Why do you even have a home office, anyway?” said an annoyed Nena.

Inez did not hear her, as he had a million things running through his mind, especially figuring out how he was going to tell Emi, who had been like a daughter to Inez and Nena since her father died shortly after she was born, and especially since her grandmother died just over a year ago.

“The tough part is going to be keeping Emi from going, *chapparita*. I know she is the eldest in her line, but she is too young, too valuable to put her life on the line in our fight against Ajaw. I wouldn’t be surprised if he did this just to get back at her family for her father’s plans to save those girls in Juarez so many years ago. He will not stop until he puts a stop to that family line, and he will continue to find ways to end all of the ten family lines, mark my words.”

“Are you going to talk to Emi, try to talk her out of going? You know she will refuse to stay. She has The Charter on her side, but we never thought we would be dealing with the end of one of the original lines,” said Nena.

“We did agree to leave her out of all future conflicts until she made sure to strengthen her family’s line after her grandmother died. Emi does not agree with the council’s decision. Etta wasn’t happy with it, but our royal leader

chose to put it up to a vote, which she lost. As much foresight as she has, I bet she didn't see that coming," gloated Inez.

"Emi will not like this, but you must convince her to stay," pleaded Nena. "You and I know that Beto and Emi can strengthen her line—that is, if Beto ever gets a clue," proclaimed Nena.

"Right, now we have to make sure they have a future together, Nena. I've got to convince Etta that we must keep protecting Emi as the last member of her line," Inez said.

"I don't know how convincing you'll be, seeing as how Etta and her sister are the last of their line on Earth. It all depends on whether the Empress wants to send more Xs if families eventually do disappear, but I don't think that's likely to happen. The royals do not feel as responsible for Ajaw's rise to power on Earth, as you and most of the council do, but I agree with Etta," responded Nena.

"How can you say that? It's our duty to keep our children and our children's children safe on Earth. We must contain Ajaw's power on this planet. If there are no Xs left to control his rule here, he will take over not only Earth, but also work his way into every corner of the universe," argued Inez.

"I think we will figure out how to defeat him before we come to the end of Xs' family lines on Earth. Etta is the strongest leader we've ever had. Some say she is heartless, but she is perfectly focused on the energies in the universe. We have to trust her more than question her, Inez."

"I'm not saying she isn't a great leader. I just think she thinks of the people of Earth as atoms, dispensable molecules. The royals need the rest of us and our

dons to keep their powers in check. Otherwise, we might have another Ajaw on our hands one day.”

“Ajaw is an anomaly, but one that can’t be contained. You’ll see. Etta will have a new plan for bringing Ajaw to justice, I just know it,” claimed Nena.

“I hope you’re right, chaparrita,” responded Inez.

Nena’s don was what humans referred to as nurturing. Her don made her capable of restoring any energy imbalance in the universe, but she mostly applied her don to plant-life and humans on Earth, as a master gardener and psychiatrist. She chose to cure the human mind because this was the place where most of a human body’s energy resided. Ajaw used his don for his own gain; he had developed the most-coveted don of all—immortality. Nena believed Ajaw had lost a sense of compassion when he became immortal, as he would never suffer any bodily harm, would never age, and, most importantly, had nothing to fear. If The Council captured him, she thought she could use don stabilizers to balance his immortality with compassion.

Inez thought Nena was gifted, but worried she was incapable of seeing the complexity of every universal being’s innate natures. “There is no clear label of ‘good’ or ‘evil,’” he would often remind his wife, “we are all a balance of these labels, and Ajaw is upsetting the balance of the entire universe by being alive. We need to execute him in public, give him a taste of human justice!”

She would often counter, “Inez, you know that will not reset balance to the universe. He needs to be sent back to Xilatano for rehabilitation, to experience the pain he has inflicted on others for himself. Only that will help him develop a sense of compassion, bring balance back to his inner being.”

Another point of disagreement between them regarded Xs and human relationships. Inez felt he was more human than Xs, while Nena thought such Xs on Earth were illogical. These conflicting philosophies resulted from Inez not being as skillful at balancing his mind with emotions as Nena was, which made him seem more human.

Although all Xs had a good understanding of balance, some were more talented at balancing the energy within themselves. Inez's don was more outward, as his don was spatial intelligence, which by human standards is a highly developed understanding of how matter functioned in the universe. He, as most Xs, was short in stature and very thin, as Xs had genetically engineered themselves to be small because it made their bodies more efficient and extended their lifespans by at least fifty human years. They rid their race of major diseases by balancing the energy within their bodies. An organism is never ill, as the people of Earth believe; it is simply out of balance. Xs used magnetic energy to move energy around in their bodies when they sensed an imbalance. In Xilatano, for example, Nena's family line had become experts at restoring balance to ailing Xs by simply using magnets.

Inez's family line was more adept at using their gifts to help solve the problems outside of an organism. At 5'7", 150 pounds, Inez could carry objects at least twice his weight. Inez could "move worlds," his wife always said. His ancestors had once managed to move an entire planet, Sagan, by two degrees off its orbit to avoid a direct hit from a large meteor, which would have easily caused catastrophic destruction to Sanen, a planet just one galaxy farther out from the center of the universe than Earth.

Nena was also small by human standards, as the top of her head was at about Inez's shoulder level, a perfect height for him to kiss the top of her head, as this

was his sign of affection for his “chapparita,” his pet name for his petite wife.

She, along with Inez and all other Xs, maintained the physical characteristics of the ancient Maya, which were not very different from Xs, with the exception of hair, as Xs had evolved beyond having hair on their bodies 10 millennia ago. The first Xs settlers had genetically modified their bodies to emulate human bodies, and subsequent generations of Xs simply maintained the same genetic makeup as the first settlers on the planet. The only glitch in the genetic modification of the first settlers was that they had not altered their respiratory systems to account for the lack of oxygen on Earth in comparison to Xilatano. When they realized they would have to stay on Earth until they captured Ajaw, they corrected this with a small surgery every X infant underwent within a week of their birth. The hope was always that Xs would return to their home planet one day when they defeated Ajaw, and they would again modify their genetic makeup to their original, X form.

Because Nena’s family line dedicated itself to restoring balance with living beings, she believed that much of human suffering resulted from an imbalance. Humans did not know how to keep their minds and emotions balanced as well as Xs. Nena felt it would be too intrusive to use magnets to restore balance to human bodies, as humans were still centuries away from discovering this technique. She had, however, been working diligently throughout her 22-year career on research developing Earth-based mind-body stabilizers, which she referred to as “don stabilizers.” Perhaps stabilizing dons and numbing human emotions was what was really wrong and one-sided, but she persisted in trying to maintain balance in the universe.

Nena and Inez finished preparing for Inez’s trip and had decided that Nena would wait in Mexico on standby, just in case the Xs did capture Ajaw. It



would be easier for her to arrange to travel to Chiapas from Juarez if The Council decided they needed her. Nena could try to use chemicals to balance him out, or at least stabilize him before The Council sent him back to Xilatano. Also, Inez wanted her to stay close to Beto and Emi, so she agreed to remain in Juarez until The Council determined what course of action to take in this latest attack on the people of Mexico.

“I’m glad Beto is more like me than you, chapparita,” Inez stated.

“Why do you say that?”

“Because he will live life more as a human than as an X, and I think that is better for him just in case we do take another generation to conquer Ajaw.”

“Inez, I think Etta will find a way to conquer Ajaw, and then all of Xs on Earth will have the option to go back to their home planet. I see that happening for Beto one day.”

“That will be a difficult decision for us all to make as a family. If he stays, we stay with him, right?”

“Yes, of course. I just don’t know what Emi would decide. What if Emi and Beto don’t form a partnership? We can clearly determine Beto is fond of her, but Emi has grown distant from him since her grandmother died and we told her the truth about her origins,” Nena said worriedly.

“I think they will form a partnership. Emi is just finding her way in this world. It’s hard enough finding your place in the world when you’re young, but it may seem impossible when you suddenly find out you’re from another planet,” reminded Inez. “We have to keep believing there is balance in the

universe, and this extends to the partnerships we create. Yes, he's like his dad that way. He knows more about the world without, and Emi's don about the world within would be perfect for him; it is exactly what he needs. He has no clue about how he looks at Emi and how she looks back at him when he isn't looking. It is a funny and beautiful thing to watch. That is the way it should be. The youngest of the line will have very great responsibilities one day, but while they're young, they need to live as carefree as only the young can live."

Inez put his arm around his wife's waist, pulled her toward him, and kissed her. "How's that for balancing me out, Nena?"

"Yes, we balance each other out, we are lucky," responded an amused Nena.

"You know who isn't lucky? Etta. None of the royals are, but I guess that is the price they pay for being royal. Something has to give when you have such direct access to the mysteries of the universe. That something is their tendency to think living beings are futile when we compare them to the inner-workings of the universe," said Inez.

"I wouldn't judge the royals too harshly, Inez. I know you don't understand how their insight makes them think reproducing is inefficient, illogical, even, but you see what over-populating a planet has done here? Think of Earth's problems as part of what sets the universe off-balance, and perhaps Etta is more sensitive to this lack of balance in the universe because she lives in one of the most inefficient planets in the universe," reminded Nena.

"Whether Earth is efficient or not, we are to blame for the violence in Mexico. I never stop thinking about the great responsibility the next generations of Xs on Earth are doomed to inherit, but the alternative, life in Xilatano

under the rule of Ajaw is a much worse fate. We have got to find those boys before, well, I don't even want to think about what can happen to them.” An enraged Inez slammed down his coffee cup on the patio table, spilling most of its contents. “Think about it, Nena, those 43 students are Beto and Emi's age! They are doing just what we want for Beto and Emi, making this planet a better place. This next generation will someday stop Ajaw and make Mexico a better country, maybe even go back to the Mayan way before Ajaw ruined an entire culture, an entire nation in our present, an entire world in the future if we don't put a stop to him.”

Nena looked into her empty coffee cup and blurted, “How can 43 students just disappear into thin air? I can't help thinking those boys are just like our boy.”

“In the long history of Ajaw's messes, I don't know if we can say this is his most cruel crime against humanity, but it does seem more personal this time,” Inez's tone was more sad than angry.

Nena went up to Inez and hugged him, as she sensed how he was having a difficult time processing his inner energy. Inez fell into her arms and began to cry uncontrollably. His overwhelming sadness for these 43 students was not in the least comparable to what 43 parents, must be feeling right now. Forty-three parents who didn't know if they would ever see their sons again. Nena suggested Inez take a don stabilizer. She walked into the bathroom, brought out a small vile and needle, and brought it to Inez.

“Here, let me inject this mild don stabilizer so you can think more clearly, so that you don't attach too many emotions to your thoughts just for tonight. Tomorrow, I will give you a longer-lasting dose that should last you a couple

of weeks, just enough time for you to go to Chiapas and come back to us. I'm taking one myself. Though it makes me feel less anxious to be in Juarez while you're gone—so that I could get to you on the private jet just in case I need to and to be in constant contact without us having to worry about Beto overhearing us—I am still on pins-and-needles every time you get called in for an emergency meeting.”

“No, I it is only fair that I feel this small dose of sadness. It will help me focus more intensely on coming up with a plan to defeat Ajaw. Yes, we might be disheartened after so many centuries of failing to end his chaos on Earth, but we can't ever lose hope. Sympathizing with humans will only make us more determined to fight, even if people like you and Etta cannot feel as the rest of us do.”

Nena let go of Inez and held his hand between both of his. “It's not that we don't feel, Inez. It is simply that we have a better understanding of the universe's energy from within. Actually, Etta, understands the universe from within just as much as she does outside of herself. I know you and some of The Council members criticize her for being callous, but we must keep her royal bloodline in mind.”