

Flower Wars

Compendium and Dramatis Personae

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Character Compendium and Dramatis Personae

This document accompanies the screenplay *Flower Wars* and is intended as a character bible for writing, revision, casting, and historical grounding. It consolidates all principal and secondary characters appearing across the existing draft, including those implied by structure and theme, and situates each within a coherent psychological, social, and political backstory. It should be read as an interpretive scaffold rather than a rigid constraint, allowing performance and revision to discover further depth.

Tlacaelel

Role: Protagonist. Imperial strategist, reformer, architect of the Flower Wars. **Age Range:** Late 20s at introduction; late life by final scenes.

Tlacaelel is depicted as a systemic thinker embedded within power rather than opposed to it. Historically attested as a key advisor to Itzcoatl and a central figure in Mexica state ideology, the screenplay presents him less as a visionary mystic than as a logistical and moral accountant of violence. His defining trait is not idealism but refusal of waste. He experiences war not as glory or sacrament, but as a consumptive process that threatens its own preconditions.

Psychologically, Tlacaelel is restrained, inward, and meticulous. He speaks rarely and precisely, preferring numbers, calendars, and constraints to rhetoric. His conflict is not with the gods as such, but with human intermediaries who mistake appetite for necessity. The Flower Wars emerge from his attempt to reconcile cosmology, demography, and continuity into a single operational structure.

His arc progresses from confident system-builder to reluctant archivist. By the final act, he no longer believes in permanence, only in the value of memory. His legacy is not victory but proof of possibility. This characterization aligns with the thematic emphasis on bounded violence and historical fragility already established in the draft 0.

Citlali

Role: Tlacaelel's wife; domestic and ethical anchor. **Age Range:** Mid-20s at introduction.

Citlali is fictional but essential. She is neither advisor nor antagonist, but a stabilizing counterweight who insists on consequences beyond policy. Where Tlacaelel thinks in generations, Citlali thinks in bodies, homes, and children. Her intelligence is practical rather than doctrinal; she does not argue cosmology but asks what survives its implementation.

Citlali's defining characteristic is clarity without ambition. She recognizes danger early and articulates it without drama. Her pregnancy, revealed late, is not melodrama but a recalibration of stakes: Tlacaelel's abstractions must now contend with a future that is literal, embodied, and fragile.

She functions structurally as the screenplay's resistance to total abstraction. Whenever systems threaten to become self-justifying, Citlali reintroduces cost.

Nezahualcoyotl

Role: Philosopher-king of Texcoco; intellectual ally. **Age Range:** Early 30s.

A historically attested poet, ruler, and thinker, Nezahualcoyotl is presented as Tlacaelel's closest intellectual equal. He understands the proposal of the Flower Wars immediately, not because he agrees with it emotionally, but because he recognizes its logical elegance.

Where Tlacaelel is austere, Nezahualcoyotl is ironic and reflective. He speaks more freely, often framing arguments in metaphor or paradox. He serves as a bridge between governance and philosophy, offering articulation where Tlacaelel offers structure.

His presence reinforces that the Flower Wars are not an isolated innovation but part of a broader Nahua intellectual milieu concerned with impermanence, balance, and recurrence.

Itzcoatl

Role: Emperor of the Mexica. **Age Range:** 40s.

Itzcoatl is pragmatic, politically exhausted, and acutely aware of imperial precarity. He supports Tlacaelel not out of ideological conviction, but because the existing model of conquest is visibly unsustainable. His garden imagery underscores his worldview: growth requires pruning, but pruning must be deliberate.

He functions as an enabler rather than a driver. His support is conditional and singular, reinforcing the danger of partial revolutions. Itzcoatl understands that once restraint becomes policy, it becomes a liability if not universally enforced.

Moctezuma

Role: War captain; future emperor; structural antagonist. **Age Range:** Early 30s.

Moctezuma is not a villain but a rival model of rationality. He believes war is fundamentally about hunger and fear, not balance. His opposition to the Flower Wars is grounded in concern that predictability erodes deterrence.

Psychologically, Moctezuma is disciplined, controlled, and deeply traditional. He fears not cruelty but softness. His arc is one of watchful skepticism: he allows the system to operate, waiting for its failure rather than provoking it.

His presence ensures that the screenplay's conflict remains internal to Mexica governance rather than externalized. He embodies the argument that empires endure through fear, not mutual recognition.

Tizoc

Role: High Priest of Huitzilopochtli. **Age Range:** 50s.

Tizoc represents institutional religion not as superstition but as cosmological administration. He does not dispute Tlacaelel's logic so much as its risks. For Tizoc, fear is a necessary language; if it is not spoken regularly, it loses coherence.

He is politically astute, aware that ritual authority depends on visible blood. His cooperation with the Flower Wars is conditional and tactical. When the system becomes too clean, he moves to reintroduce danger through supplementary sacrifice.

Tizoc's role complicates simplistic readings of Mexica religion, presenting it as an internally consistent system with its own risk management logic.

Xochitl

Role: Runner, messenger, witness, inheritor of memory. **Age Range:** Mid-teens to middle age across the film.

Xochitl is fictional but structurally central. She embodies infrastructure rather than ideology. Her body carries the system's messages; her endurance reveals its strain. She begins as a precise, obedient runner and evolves into a custodian of memory when command structures erode.

Her death whistle functions less as a weapon than as a semiotic device: signaling transitions, violations, and ultimately remembrance. Xochitl's arc mirrors the shift from governance to survival, from protocol to continuity.

She represents the generational transmission of constraint, even after institutions collapse.

Tlatoani

Role: Veteran warrior; field-level practitioner of restraint. **Age Range:** 30s.

Tlatoani is a professional soldier adapting reluctantly to new rules. He is not ideologically invested in the Flower Wars, but he recognizes their operational value once implemented. His authority comes from competence rather than rank.

He serves as the screenplay's lens into how doctrine translates into bodily practice. His corrections, commands, and hesitations demonstrate the difficulty of enforcing restraint under pressure.

Malinal

Role: Warrior; exemplar of disciplined combat. **Age Range:** Early 20s.

Malinal is a capable fighter whose inclusion emphasizes that Mexica warfare was not exclusively male. She adapts quickly to capture-oriented combat and becomes a visual proof that restraint requires skill rather than weakness.

Her moments of hesitation and post-combat shaking underscore the emotional cost of control. She is not heroicized but respected.

Yacanex

Role: Young warrior; transitional figure. **Age Range:** Late teens.

Yacanex begins as inexperienced and emotionally raw. His defining moment is linguistic rather than violent: learning to say I am captured instead of I am killed. His arc tracks the internalization of a new grammar of war.

He represents the generation for whom the Flower Wars are not an innovation but a baseline, making their eventual collapse more tragic.

Xicotencatl

Role: Tlaxcalan war leader and negotiator. **Age Range:** Mid-40s.

Xicotencatl is pragmatic, suspicious, and politically lucid. He understands that the Flower Wars benefit both sides while binding them into mutual vulnerability. His consent is never enthusiastic, only calculated.

He provides the external mirror through which the Mexica system is tested. His warning that endurance cuts both ways foreshadows the system's fragility.

Ixtlil

Role: Master obsidian weapon-crafter. **Age Range:** 60s.

Ixtlil embodies material intelligence. His skepticism is technical rather than ideological: obsidian does not forgive intention. He understands that asking weapons

to wound without killing transfers responsibility onto the wielder.

He grounds the screenplay's abstractions in craft, fracture, and consequence.

Yaotl

Role: Jungle relay station keeper; former warrior. **Age Range:** 40s.

Yaotl is infrastructure personified. Injured, observant, and dryly humorous, he represents the long tail of warfare: those who survive but are no longer fit for spectacle. His station is a hinge between cities, wars, and information.

Cuauhtémoc

Role: Young noble; future emperor. **Age Range:** Late teens.

Cuauhtémoc appears briefly but meaningfully. He absorbs Moctezuma's skepticism while questioning its inevitability. His presence situates the Flower Wars within a longer historical arc, hinting at futures beyond the film's frame.

Minor and Collective Roles

Scribes, priests-in-training, council delegates, market women, coastal watchers, and unnamed warriors function collectively rather than individually. They are treated as distributed cognition: the city thinking aloud. Their reactions—hesitation, gossip, recalculation—are essential to conveying how systemic change propagates socially.

Set and Production Design Description

The visual world of *Flower Wars* is constructed around the principle that space itself carries memory. Sets are not neutral backdrops but repositories of ritual, governance, labor, and erosion. Each location is designed to communicate constraint or its absence, and to register the slow transition from structured violence to unbounded conflict. Materials age, boundaries blur, and symmetry gives way to improvisation as the narrative progresses.

Tenochtitlan: The City as Instrument

Tenochtitlan is presented not as an exotic spectacle but as an engineered organism. Stone causeways, canals, markets, and temples form a legible geometry that reflects administrative intelligence. The city feels planned, measured, and continuously maintained. Walls are plastered and painted in muted mineral tones—reds, ochres, blues—that suggest symbolic order rather than ornament for its own sake.

The city's defining visual quality is alignment. Streets meet canals at deliberate angles. Buildings face inward toward communal space. Even domestic interiors are

arranged to echo civic logic, with mats aligned to doorways and hearths centered rather than hidden. This order reinforces Tlacaelel's worldview: violence, like architecture, must be bounded if it is to sustain what it protects.

As the film advances, this alignment begins to falter. Barricades interrupt sightlines. Temporary structures lean into permanent ones. The city remains inhabited, but its clarity degrades. The set design should allow this transition to occur subtly, without explicit commentary.

The Great Temple Complex

The Great Temple is vertical authority made visible. Its stone surfaces are worn smooth by ritual repetition, not decay. Glyphs are deeply incised and carefully repainted, signaling ongoing cosmological maintenance. Firelight and copal smoke are constant, softening edges and flattening depth, making scale difficult to judge.

Interior chambers are narrow and acoustically resonant. Sound carries upward. Chanting and breath echo, reinforcing the idea that ritual speech ascends. The altar spaces are not chaotic or bloody by default; they are orderly, procedural, and intensely formal. Sacrificial instruments are displayed as tools of office, not weapons.

As restraint erodes, the temple grows louder rather than more violent. Additional braziers are lit. Smoke thickens. The space becomes saturated, signaling escalation through density rather than gore.

Flower War Fields

The Flower War fields are deliberately modest. They are not arenas or grand stages, but carefully selected stretches of land marked by stones, banners, and boundary glyphs. The ground is level, cleared, and readable. Nothing obstructs vision. Combat occurs in daylight whenever possible.

These fields are visually defined by emptiness. There are no fortifications, no hiding places, no terrain advantages. This neutrality emphasizes mutual recognition. Everyone sees everyone else. The absence of spectacle is the spectacle.

As the system weakens, these markers disappear or are ignored. Grass grows tall. Stones are displaced. The same land becomes unrecognizable without its symbolic framing, underscoring that meaning is imposed, not inherent.

Toltec Ruins

The Toltec ruins are the film's deepest temporal layer. They are overgrown, asymmetrical, and partially collapsed. Stone heads and reliefs emerge from vegetation at odd angles, suggesting a civilization whose logic is no longer fully legible.

These sets should feel older than memory but not abandoned. Birds nest in crevices.

Roots pry stones apart slowly. The ruins are never lit artificially; they are shown in dawn, dusk, or filtered daylight. They function as silent witnesses rather than moral judges.

The visual echo between Toltec ritual combat glyphs and the Flower Wars reinforces the film's cyclical argument: restraint is rediscovered, forgotten, and rediscovered again.

Domestic Interiors

Homes are intimate, low-ceilinged, and materially honest. Walls are plastered but uneven. Textiles are worn and repaired. Storage is visible rather than hidden. Food preparation and sleeping occur in shared space, emphasizing continuity between labor and rest.

Tlacaoel's home is sparse but orderly, dominated by codices, counting stones, and wooden boards used for planning. Citlali's presence is registered through functional objects rather than decoration. The home evolves minimally, but the light within it changes—warmer early, colder later.

Domestic sets anchor the abstraction of policy in lived consequence. They remind the audience what survives policy failure.

Jungle Relay Stations

Relay stations are transitional spaces. Built from stone and wood, they are utilitarian and exposed. Roofs leak. Glyphs fade. These sets should feel maintained by habit rather than authority.

The jungle presses constantly inward. Vines creep along walls. Insects dominate the soundscape. These stations exist because people continue to believe messages matter.

As the empire destabilizes, the stations remain functional longer than palaces or temples. This endurance reinforces the film's emphasis on infrastructure over ideology.

Armories and Workshops

Armories and obsidian workshops are spaces of disciplined danger. Light is directional and sharp. Obsidian dust glitters in the air. The sound of stone striking stone is rhythmic, almost meditative.

These sets emphasize material constraint. Obsidian fractures visibly. Broken blades are kept, not discarded, reinforcing the idea that failure is instructive. Modified weapons sit beside traditional ones without hierarchy, visually embodying ideological tension.

The Coastline

The coast is deliberately underdeveloped. There are no grand ports, no monumental architecture. The shoreline is open, uncertain, and exposed. When the Spanish ships appear, they do so against a background that offers no interpretive cues.

This emptiness matters. It signals that the coming conflict does not enter an existing field. It arrives without markers, without ritual, without shared grammar.

Final Visual Register

By the final scenes, the world is quieter but less ordered. Sets are not destroyed wholesale; they persist in altered states. What remains intact are not monuments, but paths, fields, and places of teaching.

The last image the empty Flower War field should feel neither tragic nor triumphant. It is simply a space that once held meaning and could again. The set does not explain itself. It waits.

Scene-by-Scene Plot and Action Outline

This outline presents the full narrative progression of *Flower Wars* in sequential order. Each scene description summarizes the primary dramatic action, the narrative function, and the shift in stakes. The emphasis is on causal flow rather than spectacle, tracking how restraint is conceived, implemented, stressed, and finally remembered.

Scene I Tlacaelel's Home, Night

Tlacaelel works alone over codices and counting stones, establishing him as a thinker embedded in logistics rather than myth. Citlali observes his preoccupation and introduces domestic consequence. Nezahualcoyotl's visit signals that Tlacaelel's private calculations are beginning to circulate politically. The scene establishes the core problem: war as demographic and moral expenditure.

Scene II Toltec Ruins, Dawn

Tlacaelel encounters the remnants of an older civilization whose ritualized conflicts resemble what he is beginning to imagine. Xochitl is introduced as a runner, embodying the empire's communication infrastructure. The death whistle is sounded, linking fear, signal, and memory. The idea that war can be shaped rather than unleashed is visually and thematically seeded.

Scene III Causeway into Tenochtitlan, Morning

Returning warriors reveal the human cost of unconstrained warfare. Tlacaelel observes rather than commands, gathering qualitative data through conversation with a young soldier. The emptiness after victory becomes explicit. This scene motivates Tlacaelel's resolve to intervene structurally rather than rhetorically.

Scene IV Emperor's Garden

Tlacaelel presents his proposal obliquely to Itzcoatl. The Flower Wars are framed as cultivation rather than pacifism. Moctezuma's hostility introduces ideological opposition rooted in fear of weakness. Itzcoatl grants conditional support, converting Tlacaelel's idea into policy while making its success a matter of survival.

Scene V Great Temple Training Chamber

Tlacaelel confronts Tizoc, who articulates the cosmological necessity of blood. Rather than rejecting sacrifice, Tlacaelel reframes its administration. The priesthood is revealed as a parallel system of governance with its own risk calculus. Cooperation is uneasy and contingent.

Scene VI Council Chamber

The Flower Wars are formally ratified. Boundaries, calendars, and expectations are codified. Resistance is visible but contained. The war machine is not dismantled; it is constrained.

Scene VII Jungle Relay Station

Xochitl carries the first formal invitations to ritualized conflict. Tlaxcalan interest is cautious but real. The empire's informational network is shown to be essential to the system's viability. War becomes scheduled rather than reactive.

Scene VIII Moctezuma's Quarters

Moctezuma gathers captains and articulates his counterargument: predictability erodes deterrence. He chooses patience over sabotage, deciding to let the system expose its own weakness. The opposition shifts from overt to strategic.

Scene IX Training Grounds

Warriors retrain for capture-oriented combat. Physical hesitation and frustration emerge. The difficulty of translating doctrine into muscle memory becomes apparent.

Restraint is shown to be harder than brutality.

Scene X Obsidian Workshop

Weapon modifications literalize the transfer of responsibility from blade to wielder. Craft becomes ideology. The fragility of obsidian mirrors the fragility of the system itself.

Scene XI First Flower War Field

The first ritualized conflict unfolds. Combat is intense but bounded. Language changes as warriors name capture rather than death. The system works, but only through constant vigilance.

Scene XII Archive

Scribes document the battle with unprecedented granularity. War becomes data. Memory is formalized, and precedent is created.

Scene XIII Diplomatic Feast

Tlaxcalan leadership negotiates terms. Mutual survival replaces total victory as the operative goal. Trust remains provisional. The Flower Wars become an inter-polity institution rather than a unilateral experiment.

Scene XIV Sanctioned Field

A violation occurs. New rules are introduced to manage rule-breaking. Enforcement replaces idealism. The system hardens, losing flexibility while gaining authority.

Scene XV Montage of Flower Wars

The system reaches maturity. Battles recur. Casualties stabilize. Warriors age within the structure. The Flower Wars become routine, effective, and increasingly impersonal.

Scene XVI Reflective Interlude

Tlacaelel observes the system functioning without him. He recognizes both its success and its brittleness. The cost of institutionalization becomes clear.

Scene XVII Coastline

Foreign ships appear. They do not recognize the field, the calendar, or the signals. The Flower Wars are revealed as contingent on shared grammar.

Scene XVIII Armory

Moctezuma mobilizes unrestricted force. The old rules are set aside. Tlacaelel does not resist, recognizing that the system cannot encompass this threat.

Scene XIX Jungle Engagement

Combat with the Spanish is chaotic and asymmetric. Capture fails as a concept. Restraint becomes lethal. The Flower Wars collapse in practice.

Scene XX Great Temple

Ritual intensifies in response to disorder. Blood increases as control decreases. Cosmology reacts to failure with escalation.

Scene XXI Tlacaelel's Home

Citlali's pregnancy reframes the crisis as generational. Tlacaelel abandons system-building in favor of preservation and teaching.

Scene XXII City in Flux

Refugees, runners, and soldiers cross paths. Infrastructure persists while authority fragments. Xochitl salvages symbols rather than obeys commands.

Scene XXIII Teaching Ground

Tlacaelel instructs youths at a former field, emphasizing memory over victory. The Flower Wars are reframed as a lesson rather than a solution.

Scene XXIV Relay Station

Xochitl continues running messages without a central authority. Communication becomes ethical rather than political.

Scene XXV Archive

The Flower Wars are recorded as ended, not failed. History is stabilized against mythologization.

Scene XXVI Toltec Ruins

Tlacaelel acknowledges the continuity of attempt across civilizations. Restraint is shown as recurrent but fragile.

Scene XXVII Empty Field

The final Flower War field lies unmarked and overgrown. A death whistle sounds as memory rather than command. The space remains available to future meaning.

This document is intended to support revision, pacing analysis, production planning, and performance, while preserving the film's core argument: that the tragedy of the Flower Wars lies not in their impermanence, but in the rarity of their attempt. The materials gathered here—outlines, character studies, and interpretive notes—are not prescriptions but scaffolding, meant to clarify structure without exhausting meaning.

Note: These descriptions should be treated as starting conditions rather than constraints. They exist to orient interpretation, not to close it. Performers, directors, and collaborators are encouraged to allow gesture, silence, rhythm, and omission to complete what the text deliberately leaves unresolved.