

Chapter 17

Date: Monday, February 23rd, 1987

Narrated by: Victor Koupka

My plane lands late Monday afternoon in Mexico City. With my single carry-on, I pass through customs without incident and make my way to the rental car place. The smell of Mexico greets me like an interpreter with bad breath. I take in only what I need.

After finalizing paperwork and receiving keys, I drive a red VW Bug into a city built on top of another city. I grind gears as I speed up and slow down for the endless speed bumps. After several turnarounds, I make it outside the reach of the urban sprawl of Mexico City.

Rolling across the open desert valley, I speed to save daylight. I still need to meet up with José.

God, I hope they haven't re-excavated the tunnel underneath the Pyramid of the Sun. Anywhere but there.

Only a few miles from the City of the Gods, I turn off the main highway. A nameless road takes me out into the desert, to José Enrica's house.

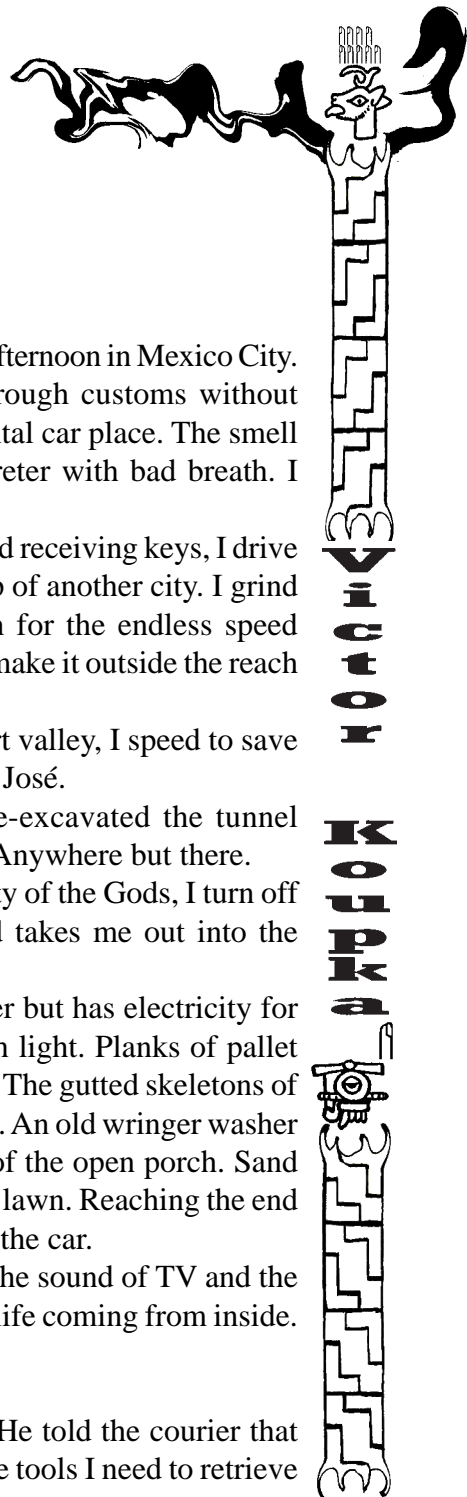
His shack lacks running water but has electricity for his TV, which acts as a low-lit porch light. Planks of pallet wood make up the walls of his home. The gutted skeletons of two Bugs lie scattered across his yard. An old wringer washer has fallen to its death from the end of the open porch. Sand and tan weeds make up the rest of his lawn. Reaching the end of his long drive, I park and shut off the car.

As I walk toward the house, the sound of TV and the flash of its light are the only signs of life coming from inside.

“José! José!”

Nothing.

Damn it! He better be here! He told the courier that he would be ready. He would have the tools I need to retrieve



“Si,” I confirm. “Let’s go. ¿Ya estas listo para ir?”

“O no, Señor. Yo no voy a ninguna parte. Estoy crudo. I no go. I suffer hangover. Lleva te mi muchacho en mi lugar. Take Benito,” he barthers.

The boy stands at the edge of the door watching from a safe distance.

“You are joking, right? “¿Estas bromeando, verdad?”

“No, Señor. El es un muchacho quétrabaja muy duro.”

“What about the tools? ¿Y las herramientas? Supuesto qué hay problema consiguiendo las herramientas?” I bark.

“O no, Señor. No problema. El te enseña donde estan las herramientas. Benito will show you tools. ¿Bueno, Señor?”

“Bueno.”

Damned incompetent. You aren’t getting anything extra from me now. This is just great. I’m screwed if those tools are a joke.

Turning back, the boy stands there watching. With a sad smile, he waits.

There’s no sense in arguing with José. Hah! The boy tried to tell me. I’ll just be wasting time if I stay.

The dying light of the sun fades beyond the distant ripple of mountains. Still, the evening air clings to its warmth.

I follow the boy back behind the shack. A shed sits there dilapidated. Its door simply leans against the opening to partially block it.

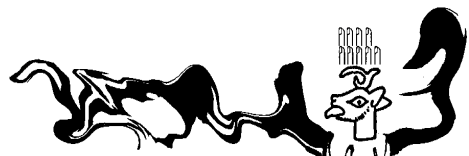
The boy wrestles with it. It’s big and awkward, and the boy struggles to move it an inch.

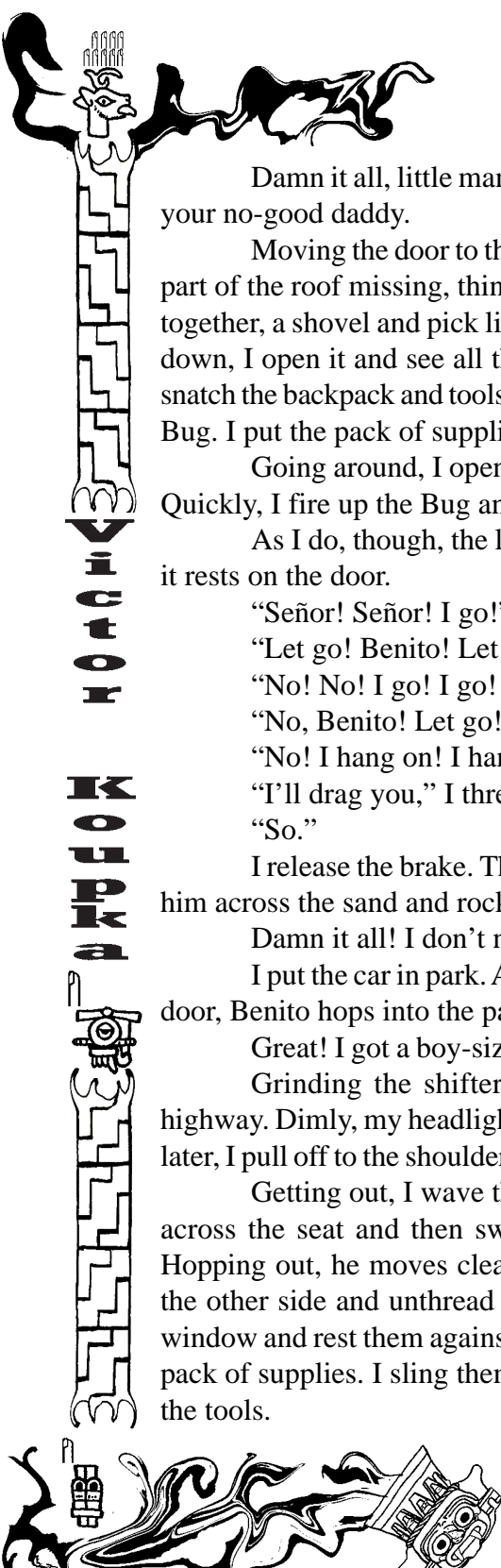
“Watch out, little man,” I recommend.

He looks at me. Lost in translation. With a hand, I swish him away.

Damn it all! This kid is going to be more trouble than he’s worth. He looks eight but is more likely ten. Poorly fed. He looks like a kid in the Camps. Hah! Except with a tan.

God, I must be really desperate if I’m even thinking of using this kid.





Damn it all, little man. If I was a violent man, I'd shot your no-good daddy.

Moving the door to the side, I look into the shed. With part of the roof missing, things remain visible inside. Bound together, a shovel and pick lie next to a backpack. Crouching down, I open it and see all the things that I had requested. I snatch the backpack and tools and carry them out to the parked Bug. I put the pack of supplies in the back seat.

Going around, I open the driver-side door and get in. Quickly, I fire up the Bug and reach to shift it into first.

As I do, though, the little boy latches onto my arm as it rests on the door.

"Señor! Señor! I go!" he pleads.

"Let go! Benito! Let go!" I demand.

"No! No! I go! I go! Must go!" he entreats.

"No, Benito! Let go!"

"No! I hang on! I hang on!"

"I'll drag you," I threaten.

"So."

I release the brake. The car rolls backwards, dragging him across the sand and rock. Still he hangs on.

Damn it all! I don't need this.

I put the car in park. As I open and step away from the door, Benito hops into the passenger seat.

Great! I got a boy-sized Chihuahua. Just what I need.

Grinding the shifter into drive, I backtrack to the highway. Dimly, my headlights show the way. Some distance later, I pull off to the shoulder. With no traffic, I work quickly.

Getting out, I wave the boy out of the car. He crawls across the seat and then swings his legs toward the door. Hopping out, he moves clear of the closing door. I walk to the other side and unthread the handles from the passenger window and rest them against the door hinge while I grab the pack of supplies. I sling them over my shoulder and pick up the tools.

Scanning the horizon, I get my bearings and start out. My destination is the hill on the horizon, a man-made mountain. The Pyramid of the Sun.

This has been a long time coming. Talk about the odd life. It's been one of extremes, surviving the Auschwitz death camp to this, the finding of the Skull of Smoking Mirrors.

I hate to admit it but both things are because of my twin brother, Mikeal. It's crazy. Ever since he moved back to New York to live with his gay lover, we haven't seen much of each other. But when he was living out on the west coast in the 60's and 70's, I went out to visit him once a year at least. That's when I met Harry Warner.

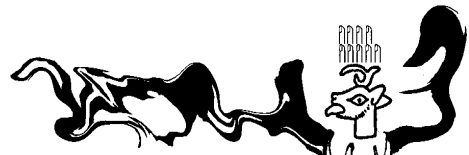
Now there was a collector. Harry had to have over fifty mural fragments from Teotihuacán, alone. I wonder if it was his idea to glue them to plywood. Hah! I bet the de Young Museum loved him for it when they received them after his death in 1976. Just last year, though, the San Francisco-based institute gave the priceless collection back to Mexico.

How did he come across so much stuff? Maybe he worked with René Millon on the Mapping of Teotihuacán. He would have had access to the site for several years in the early 60's. He never did give many details as to how he acquired the rare artifacts.

Well, I guess it couldn't have been too reputable. Look back at that time in '73 when we couldn't enter Mexico. There are so many things that I don't understand about Harry. Above all, I still don't know why he sent the diary of Don Carlos to me. Hah! Either way, my life has been a blur ever since.

One thing, I should have had the journal professionally translated in the beginning. That would have saved me time and a lot of headaches. The further I went with it, the stranger the translation became. The whole thing started to frustrate me at the end.

Who would have thought that Don Carlos and his excavating team had actually resealed the tunnel after finding





it underneath the Pyramid of the Sun? Why would they do that without taking the Skull of Smoking Mirrors? He never clearly stated the reason. Maybe it's because they were more likely looking for gold instead. That still doesn't explain why they would go to the extra effort of re-bricking twenty-nine walls in a hundred-yard tunnel.

God, I hope the Skull is still in that hidden chamber. If not, this has all been a waste.

At least Mansfield recognizes that there's a chance the Skull is not there. Once I mentioned the diary of Don Carlos, Mansfield was convinced.

The Pyramid grows taller as I lead the way through the maze of spiny nopal cacti. The walk is a long one from where I parked the car. I head for the western path that goes to the foot of the Pyramid. I glance back and see the boy tagging close behind. He has no trouble keeping up.

Yeah, because I'm carrying everything.

Well, maybe the boy will actually serve a purpose. Maybe I won't have to bust that big of a hole. The less damage done the better.

Past the small forest of bloodletting trees, I head east. The path is straight and clear of the wounding cacti. The cover of night allows the luxury of walking down the open road.

A strange silence consumes the evening. The creatures of the night haven't arisen yet. The arid land still sleeps and the boy and I walk straight in, like we own the place.

Reaching the stairs leading down to the Avenue of the Dead, I stop and lean against the shovel, staring at the man-made mountain.

At its highest, Teotihuacán served as home for over a hundred thousand people. Now it's a ghost town. One of epic proportion, but a ghost town just the same. Whatever sway it had held over the Valley of Mexico has been reduced to a great enigma now. The City of the Gods sits outside the realm of standard thinking. Its influence is more indirect. Sublime.



Still, I am winded. The years are catching up.

With a heavy sigh, I continue. I take the short stone steps down to the Avenue of the Dead. I cross the smooth roadway and climb up the flight of stairs on the far side. They lead to a five-foot wide flat plateau that runs the length of the plaza of the Sun. Steps from the walkway empty into a sunken court. I continue and the boy follows close behind me.

The tunnel is in sight. I head straight for it, climbing the steps. My destiny is at hand. Only an iron gate stands in my way. A swift swat from the sledge hammer remedies that.

With rope I tie the gate open, and ready the descent. I wait until we are inside to turn on the flashlight. We don't need to draw attention to this little excavation.

My heart quickens as the world draws incredibly close. The tunnel is narrow. The flashlight pushes back the darkness. The boy mumbles. The fear of his father drives him on.

It's just business for me.

The closeness of the tunnel tugs at my breath. The subterranean coolness does little to soothe me. As I go past the dismantled walls, my destiny grows closer with each step. I would run if I weren't carrying so much equipment.

Glancing back, I find the boy lagging.

“Keep up! ¡Mantente! ¡Mantente!”

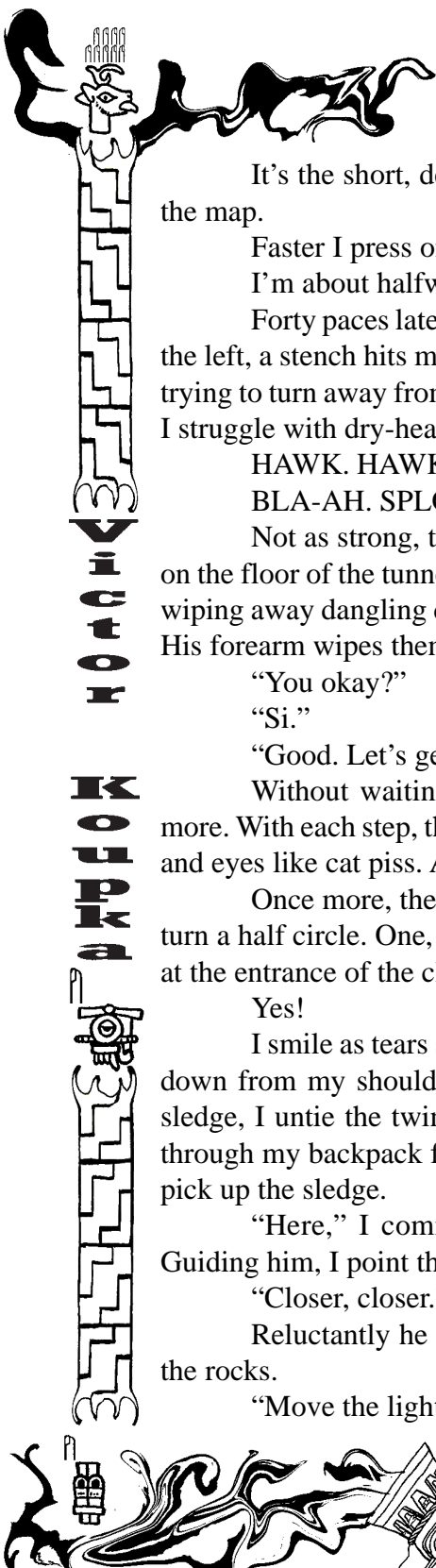
Damn it all! I'm going to regret dragging this kid along.

As we move across the walls, the light covers the complete width of them and some of the ceiling. My eyes study everything. From the stones littering the ground to the markings on the walls, nothing escapes me.

I wish I had more time. More time to really study it all. Onward I go.

The strap on my backpack rubs hard on my shoulder and I stop to switch it to the other side. Picking up the long-handled tools, I continue. A short distance later, the beam opens wider.





It's the short, dead-end tabs off the tunnel shown on the map.

Faster I press on.

I'm about halfway there now.

Forty paces later, after veering to the right and then to the left, a stench hits me like a slap to the face. Stopping and trying to turn away from the smell, I lean up against the wall. I struggle with dry-heaves.

HAWK. HAWK.

BLA-AH. SPLOOSH. SPLOOSH.

Not as strong, the boy vomits behind me. It splashes on the floor of the tunnel. The light shows him hunched over wiping away dangling drool. Tears well up in the boy's eyes. His forearm wipes them away.

"You okay?"

"Si."

"Good. Let's get this done, then."

Without waiting for his reply, I start walking once more. With each step, the stench intensifies. It burns my nose and eyes like cat piss. Already, my head throbs from it.

Once more, the tunnel opens up. From left to right, I turn a half circle. One, two, three and four openings, I stand at the entrance of the clover-shaped cave.

Yes!

I smile as tears stream from my eyes. The pack slides down from my shoulder. Still holding onto the shovel and sledge, I untie the twine binding them together. After I dig through my backpack for a pair of gloves, slip them on, and pick up the sledge.

"Here," I command as I hand him the flashlight. Guiding him, I point the light into the southeast chamber.

"Closer, closer." I order.

Reluctantly he inches forward. The light pours over the rocks.

"Move the light," I bark.

Behind the bright glare, I see a look of bewilderment. Frustrated, I snatch the flashlight from him.

“Stand back,” I direct.

Slowly, I inch the light across the seam where the floor and the wall meet. I am looking for the slightest difference.

“Please be here! Please be here!” I pray.

Scanning the length of it, I see nothing outstanding.

“Shit! This can’t be happening,” I plead.

Once more, I study the length of it but in the opposite direction. Still nothing.

“Shit! Shit! Shit! This can’t be happening,” I groan.

Thoughts cram into my head as the smell sickens me. Where the hell is that smell coming from? I can’t think straight.

Ha! I’m here. I couldn’t have been thinking straight in the first place.

God, where is that smell coming from? Maybe this is the wrong chamber. Maybe... Hey, what’s this?

Something shimmering seeps from the wall. It oozes four feet from the floor in the form of a block.

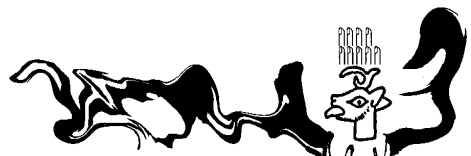
“Here. Hold this.”

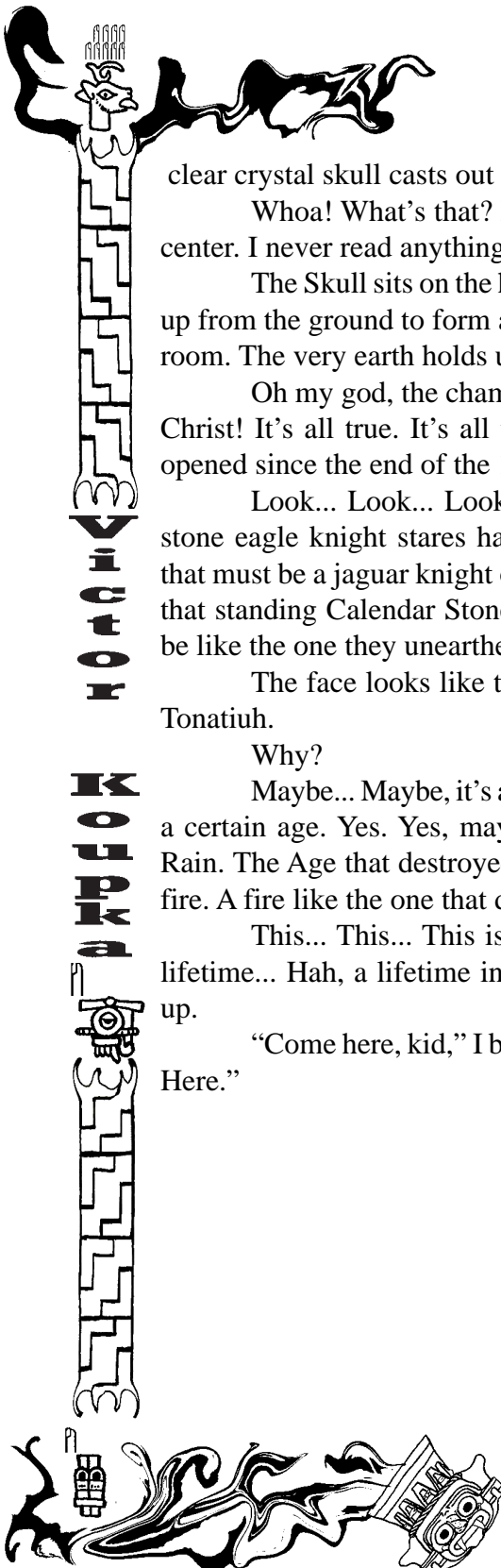
The boy takes the flashlight and holds it on the block. Because it is located in the wall between the southeast and northeast chambers, I have lots of room to swing the sledge. Setting the sledge down for a moment, I get the boy into position. Standing by the northeast corner, he shines the light at a good angle.

Picking up the hammer, I slam it against the rock. Broken bits fly in all directions. Large chunks break away and roll across the ground. Pausing, I take the flat-nosed shovel and clear away the debris. As I do, a puff of air rolls over me. It has the stench of death but it also means that I have broken into the chamber.

“Here. Give me the light,” I demand.

On my hands and knees, I stare into the chamber. The Skull of Smoking Mirrors shimmers like a mirrored ball. The





clear crystal skull casts out a kaleidoscope of colors.

Whoa! What's that? It... It... It looks like it has a red center. I never read anything about it having that.

The Skull sits on the hands of two stone arms that rise up from the ground to form a T. It stands in the center of the room. The very earth holds up the Skull.

Oh my god, the chamber is immaculate. Jesus! Jesus Christ! It's all true. It's all true. This chamber hasn't been opened since the end of the 1600's.

Look... Look... Look at the statues in the corner. A stone eagle knight stares hard in my direction. And... And that must be a jaguar knight over in the other corner. Look at that standing Calendar Stone, but... but it doesn't appear to be like the one they unearthed in Mexico City back in 1790.

The face looks like the symbol for Tlaloc instead of Tonatiuh.

Why?

Maybe... Maybe, it's an earlier Calendar Stone making a certain age. Yes. Yes, maybe the third age of Man, Four Rain. The Age that destroyed by fiery rain. A great glorious fire. A fire like the one that destroyed the city above me.

This... This... This is incredible. I... I could spend a lifetime... Hah, a lifetime in a Mexican jail if I don't hurry up.

"Come here, kid," I bark. "It's time to earn your keep. Here."

Chapter 18

Narrated by: Benito Enrica

Date: Monday, February 23rd, 1987

“Oh, I feel sick. Oh, it feels like I might get sick again. Oh, my belly hurts.” I try to tell the old man.

He ignores me.

“O Papa, yo no debo estar aquí. Papa, este hombre no debe de estar aquí. Este es un lugar malo. Un lugar malo. Un lugar malo, Papa, yo se... Yo se qué si es. O Papa, tiene olor de muerte aquí abajo.

“Quit your complaining and come here,” he barks.

I squat down next to him and follow his bony finger. I look through the hole.

“¡O! ¡O! ¡O! ¡Mire! ¡Mire! Look! Hay una cabeza de vidrio en esas manos. Mira como brilla. It’s a glass head.”

“That’s why we’re here,” he smiles as he pushes up his glasses.

“So get going and crawl through the hole. Once inside, go and bring back the glass head. ¿Comprendes?”

“No! No! Don’t make me go. It... It scares me.”

I lean away from the hole. His joy has turned to anger. The old man’s long nails dig into my arm.

“Awh,” I cry

“Get in there, damn it all,” he barks.

“No, I’m sca...”

“I don’t care, boy,” he cuts in. “Crawl through that goddamned hole or I’ll leave you in this godforsaken tunnel. Then... Then you will have to answer to your father.”

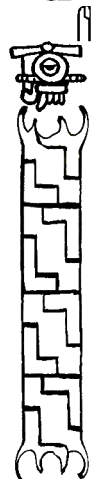
“No! No! No! Please, sir! No. Please, don’t tell Papa. Please! Please, don’t tell Papa. I’ll go. I’ll go.”

“That’s better. Besides, you are making more out of it than it really is. It’s just a simple artifact. It will be all right. Here’s the flashlight. It will help you.”



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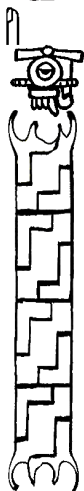
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“Si.”

Oh... Oh... Oh, this is no good. No good. No good at all. Oh, I feel sick. Oh, my belly hurts. The dirt is cold. I need a poncho.

“Awh!”

The sharp rocks cut me. Oh, I’m bleeding. Oh, the dirt stings me. Sweat drips in my eyes. Oh, my nose runs.

This is no good.

HAWK. HAWK. HAWK.

Oh... Oh... Oh, this is no good.

HAWK. HAWK. HAWK.

“Hold on, kid. Hold on, kid. Try to hold it in, kid. It’ll be worse crawling through a mess like that.”

HAWK. HAWK. HAWK.

Oh, this is no good.

Faster, faster I crawl.

“Awh! Awh! Oh, that hurt,” I cry.

Head too high. Rocks cut into me.

Jammed. I kick. I twist. I paw at the ground. Still I’m stuck.

“No! No! No! Oh! Oh! I knew...”

“Calm down! Calm down, kid!” he badgers. “You’re not really stuck. Stop it. Stop it, now. Quit your struggle. Lie flat on the ground and you’ll find you have more room than you thought.”

“No! I’m...” I stop.

I lie there. My heart pounds. It pounds like a drum in my ears.

My... My head. My head, it’s not hitting the stone now.

“See. See, little man. It’s all right,” he adds. “I know you’re scared but there’s nothing to be scared of down here.”

“What... What about the smell?”

“That’s trapped water seeping through the rock. Forget about it, boy. Just keep crawling.”

“Si.”



At the end of the tunnel, I squeeze into the room.

“Wow!” I cry “!Mira! !Mira! Look! Look!”

“Shhh,” the old man commands. “Don’t you worry about anything except that crystal head.”

“Oh, but look at those statues in the corners. They look mean. There’s four of them. Two birdmen and two are catmen. They’re... They’re twice as tall as me and... and their heads nearly touch the ceiling.

“Wow! Wow! Look how the head shines. It’s no bigger than a coconut. The stone hands hold it up for me. Ha-ha-ha! Even the dust can’t hide the shine. It’s... It’s a star.”

“Come on. Come on. Just grab the Skull and let’s go.”

“Oh... Oh... It’s cool. It chills my fingers. Oow, it’s so smooth, though.”

“Be careful. Everything depends on what’s in your hands. ¿Comprendes?”

“Si.”

It’s like a big egg, and I cradle it in my left arm and hold the light in the other.

Drip, drip, something drops on my shoulder. Oh, it’s wet.

“Oh, what just dropped on me?”

“Huh?” questions the old man. “What’s going on in there, kid?”

“I... I... I can hear the water moving about me.”

“Forget about the damned water and just bring me the Skull,” the old man hisses.

“Okay. Okay.”

Drip, drip, some more falls.

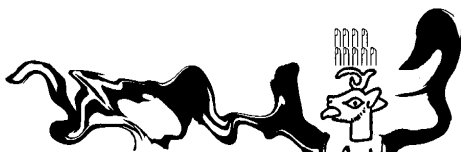
What is that? That’s not water. It’s... It’s... It’s too slimy. Forget it. Just get to the hole.

I cross the cold stone floor. Near the hole, I squat.

“Oh... Oh...”

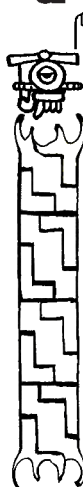
“What? What? What’s going on?”

“The... The... The head is moving. It’s dropping!”



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“Catch it! Catch it! Forget about the light! Just catch the Skull! Damn it all.”

My hands shake. I clutch the head. The light drops to the floor and rolls back and forth.

“What’s going on? You caught it, right? Right?”

“Si.”

“Good. So give it to me.”

Drip, drip, more falls from the ceiling.

“Yuck! I don’t think that’s water.”

I set the head down.

TINK.

“What was that? What the hell are you doing? Give me the Skull.”

“It’s all right. I’m just picking up the light. I can’t see the hole.”

“I’m right here, damn it all. I’m right here.”

“Okay. Okay. I’m just moving the light a little.”

“Come on. It doesn’t matter.”

The old man’s fingers frantically wiggle in the light. Hah, they look like crazy worms.

“Give me the Skull. Just give me the Skull,” he moans.

“Yes, yes, yes.”

The man wants it as if this head were made from gold, not glass.

I reach for it but stop.

“Wow!” I say, “look at that.”

“What? What? What?”

“The... The... The red dot in the center looks like my hand, now, don’t it? Don’t it?”

“Yes! Yes! Yes! Now give it to me!” he commands.

“Look, look. When... When... When I run my finger on the glass slow, the red follows it. Look, look, look. I’ll do it again.”

“No! No! No! Don’t do that!”

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“All right. All right,” I respond as I touch the head.
“Whoa! It’s... It’s warm. Look. Look. It’s moving faster.”

The red runs up the side of the head. Up, up, it comes to my finger.

“Wow! That’s so cool. Look. Look. I’ll drag it up to the top. To the top where there is a hole.”

“No! No! No! Don’t do that! ¡No hagas eso!”

“¿Qué es el problema con migo,” I start.

Then I feel it touch me.

“Awh! Awh! Awh!” I scream. “It’s burning me! Oh my god! Oh my god! It burns!”

“What’s wrong? What’s wrong?” the old man barks.

“Awh! Awh! Awh! The red dot burnt me. My finger! My finger is on fire!”

“Give me the Skull and... and... and I’ll get it out of the way so you can come back through.”

“No! No! No! I don’t want to touch it. Never again!”

“Damn it all! Slide it over with your elbow if you have to, but give me the damn skull,” he screams.

“I... I...”

“Do it, damn it all!”

Slowly, I slide it with my elbow.

“Be careful!”

The old man stretches even farther for it. I push it closer. His fingers touch it. His fingers frantically grasp for it. He draws it in.

“Yes! Yes! It’s mine! It’s mine!” he screams.

“Okay. Okay. I can come out now. Right? Right?” I ask. “Me siento enfermo. Me siento enfermo. I feel sick.”

“Hold on! Hold on! Just give me a second to put the Skull away. Then I’ll pull you out.”

“Please! Please! Hurry, I’m on fire.”

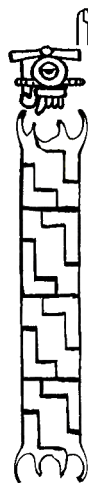
HAWK. HAWK. HAWK.

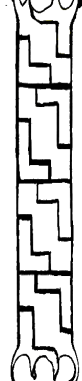
“Okay. Okay. Okay.”



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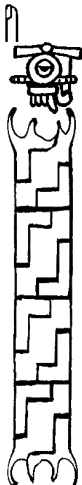
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My belly churns. I turn the light to watch the old man. I watch him pull out a black box from his backpack. Slowly, he moves.

“Oh, please, Señor! I’m burning up. My... My... My finger is as big as my thumb. Please!”

“Damn it all! Quit your whining! I’m almost done.”

HAWK. HAWK. HAWK.

BLAAH. SPLOOSH.

BLAAH. BLAAH. SPLOOSH. BLAAH. SPLOOSH.

“Oh, great, kid. Now you’ve made a mess. Here. Here. I’m coming.”

Drip, drip, some more drops on me.

“Yuck!”

This time, it slides down the side of my face.

“Oh god, what is that?”

Fumbling with the light, I turn it upward. The ceiling seems to be moving. What... What are those little glowing....

EEK. EEK. EEK.

“No! No! No! There’s bats! There’s bats! Help me! Help me! Help me! They’re dropping on me.”

“Here! Here! Grab my arms. Come on, kid. We got to get out of here. Jesus Christ, we’re already getting swarmed. Come on! Come on! We got to get out of here! Give me the light.”

“Tengo miedo. Tengo miedo. I’m scared, Señor.”

“I know. I know. I have you! I have you! I’ll drag you out... Awh! Awh! You’re digging into my flesh. Careful! Careful! Awh! Awh! Shit, kid! I’m bleeding.”

“Pull me out! Pull me out! Please! Please!” I scream. “I don’t want to die! I don’t want to die! Please! Please! Please save me. No me quiero morir. No me quiero morir. I don’t want to die.”

“Quit thrashing, damn it. Quit thrashing. You’re going to get stuck,” the old man commands.

“Please! Please! Get me out of here.”



“Awh! You’re killing my arms, kid. I’m bleeding all over. Stop it, damn it all.”

“Oh! Oh! Oh! My... My... My hands are slipping. No! No! No! I’m losing my grip.”

His arms slip from my hands. Still stuck, I lie there.

The bats jam up around me, clawing, crawling and biting their way out of the opened chamber.

“Awh! Awh! The bats are attacking!” the old man screams. “They’re attacking. Oh, I’m sorry, kid. But... But... You’re stuck and I can’t get you out.”

“No me dejes. No me dejes,” I scream. “Don’t leave.”

All I hear in response is the squeaking of bats and shuffling of his shoes back up the tunnel.

“No! No! Don’t leave me.”

The light flees from me. Only the bats stay. But, they gnaw and lick at me like a dying dog.

Oh... Oh, this isn’t good.

The pain jolts me like... like an electric prod.

“Oh... Oh... Oh, I feel sick again.”

HAWK. HAWK. HAWK.

BLAAH. SPLOOSH.

BLAAH. SPLOOSH. BLAAH. SPLOOSH.

“Awh! Awh! It... It... It smells like the rotten water.”

HAWK. HAWK. HAWK.

“Oh no! There was no water. The old man lied. No! No! No!”

I drift out.

In time, I open my eyes. As I do, though, I see... I see... I see lights from a city.

How? How is this possible? Am I dead? I... I... I was in the tunnel. In the tunnel with the old man. Where am I?

Tamoanchan.

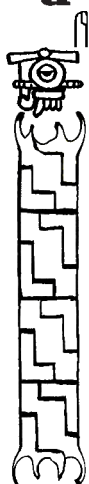
The Land of Mist and Rain?

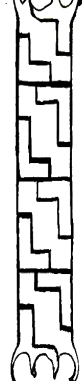
Yes. Yes.



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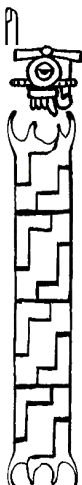
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How do I know this? How is this possible?

The blood.

What blood? Whose blood? The old man's blood. The old man that left me to die?

No.

Then, whose?

Smoking Mirrors.

Who?

HAWK. HAWK. HAWK.

BLAAH. SPLOOSH.

BLAAH. BLAAH. SPLOOSH. BLAAH. SPLOOSH.

Do not resist. Let go. I shall handle everything. I shall save you. You shall fear no one anymore.

Where am I?

At the beginning. Relax.

The moon shines strong over the jungle valley. The stars sparkle in the clear sky.

Yes. All is aligned.

This is incredible. Tamoanchan looks like an island of light from here. The torches around the ball-court burn in the shape of an I. Already, folks gather for tonight's game.

One night, I will play the game. I shall bring honor back to our family. For once again, Father failed miserably last night. Never shall I be humiliated like that.

How much has Five Flower soaked Father for now?

No matter. I shall restore my family honor.

Yes, you can with my help.

Then... Then all shall see who is the best ball player in all of Olmeca. All shall see that I am even better than my older twin brother.

My brother?

Yes. Winged Serpent.

Yes. But where is he now? Why is he not here telling me I should be at home indoors out of reach of the demons of the night? Why is he not pestering me? Telling me that I am



seeing too much. Telling me that only from the hillside temple can so much be seen. And never should it be seen at night.

Hey! Why am I here?

To greet me.

What? I don't understand. Who are you? Where are you? I hear you but I don't see you.

You will. Look up and you shall witness my fall. From the heavens, I shall come to you.

Wow! Shooting stars! Look how you light up the evening sky. You just keep getting brighter and brighter.

Yes. Yes.

No! No! You come straight for me. Why me? Why me?

It had to be someone. Why not you? Would you rather it had been your brother that your father gave to Five Flowers to be reborn as a living god?

Reborn? Am I dead? Living god? Not possible.

Through the blood, anything is possible. Everlasting life. Your thoughts and emotions shall last as long as you feed your hunger to survive. This is the power I offer.

How is such a thing possible?

Through the blood.

What blood?

It shall begin with the pool in front of you.

Glancing down, I see my reflection in a shimmering pool of blood. And for the first time, I realize I am bound to a wooden T. I stand at the back of a sunken stone-basin of bloodlocated in the temple plaza.

No! No! No! This can't be happening. I struggle.

HAWK. HAWK. HAWK.

BLAAH. SPLOOSH.

BLAAH. BLAAH. SPLOOSH. BLAAH. SPLOOSH.

Do not struggle. It is inevitable.

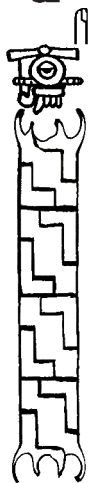
What's going on?


The change.



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No! No! No! This can't be happening.

I struggle.

Too late for that now. I am here.

SPLOOSH.

Burning bits of the falling star pelt the deep pool of blood. Loud hisses cry out over the stone plaza. An angry mist of blood showers me.

No! No! No! This can't be happening.

I struggle to break free.

You can't shake me. I shall gnaw at you like your brother but four hundred times worse.

No!

Do you hear that?

What?

I am coming.

SHURP. SHURP. SHURP. SHURP. SHURP.

The bats wings deafen the night. Like a cloud of darkness, they descent upon me.

No! No! No!

I struggle. I break free.

No! I am falling.

SPLOOSH.

Face first I splash down in the boiling pit of blood. So many souls sacrificed for this single moment. With it, I steep in this with the essence of evil. The charred remains of the Evil One seeps into me.

“Awh! Awh! Awh!”

The pain... The pain... The pain is unbearable... like... like the time when the red in that glass head bit...

The Skull of Smoking Mirrors? I'm Smoking Mirrors.

Huh? What's going on? Memories melts together. I can't sort it out. What's real?

The pain... The pain... Can't think straight... My body... My body burns... It burns like the time... in... in... in...

In Teotihuacán.

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Yes. Yes, the City of the Gods. They... They did that... They did that to me... My brother, his lover and her brother bound me... Drained me... Then burnt me... Burnt me and the rest of my glorious city...

Yes. The Triple Alliance did that.

No. No. No, this doesn't make sense.

Don't struggle. Relax.

No!

HAWK. HAWK. HAWK.

BLAAH. SPLOOSH.

BLAAH. BLAAH. SPLOOSH. BLAAH. SPLOOSH.

As I linger in pain, a smell draws out *the hunger* from within.

Suffering, I awake. My tongue laps at the smell as if I can taste it in the air.

I can. I can. I taste it. But... But, what is that? What is it that I taste?

Blood.

Whose blood?

His blood. Victor Koupka's blood.

How?

It still covers the hands and fingers you are sucking on, now.

I find my fingers deep in my mouth. Pulling them out, I look at them. They are clean but wet with spit. In that moment, *the suffering* subsides. The burning leaves me.

How is this possible?

The blood. Find me and I shall reveal more to you.

Where shall I find myself?

The old man...

How do I find...

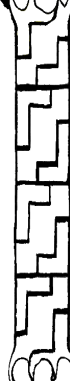
Think only of the old man and the blood shall do the rest...

America?

Yes...

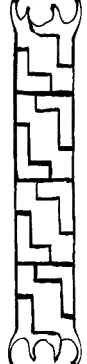


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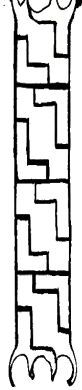


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The East Coast?
Yes...
 On an island?
Yes...
 Manhattan?
Yes...



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