

The Time Father Sun Killed All the Boys

The first people in this world were often confused about their children. Sometimes they forgot to feed them or give them clothing. Sometimes they forgot to name them, and those children would only call each other "No-name" or "Whoareyou." The parents did not understand that their children would grow into men and women. They thought their children were going to stay small all their lives. That was because Father Sun made the first people already in their strength; no one had seen infants grow into adults before. So they let their boys and girls run around the village like batz', the spider monkey, screeching all day, and they did not teach them any useful things.

When those children grew older the girls went through changes, and their mothers gave them the pleated skirt of women. After that the girls stayed inside the huts and did not run around any more. But the boys did not change much. They grew bigger, but no one really noticed. Their fathers just heard that their voices were louder, and they smacked those boys to make them quieter.

The boys became surly. "I am bigger now," they said. "See how strong I have become?"

"Go and hunt, then," said the men. "Go spear fish. Go make noise with the other animals."

So the boys decided to hunt, and to fish, and to climb trees and collect fruit like their fathers. They tried to chip flint knives and obsidian spear heads. They tried to chip dart heads from chert. Well, those are not easy things to do. All the spears those boys made fell apart when they threw them. The tips broke, and the heads fell off the shafts. The atlatls broke when the boys tried to use them, their darts flew in whiffing spirals or end over end.

Their fathers said, "Why are you trying to act like men? Go collect sticks and play with your toys. This is the place given you by the gods and goddesses."

But those boys did not give up, they did not go back to toys. They made more spear tips and more darts. They hunted boa constrictors.



They hunted ain, the crocodile. But their spears were too weak, and they broke on ain's skin. Their darts were crooked, and the boa constrictors slid away in the trees. Some of those boys ended up dragged into the water and eaten, it's true. Some of them were pulled into the trees and swallowed by snakes. The other boys ran back to the village and told their fathers what had happened.

Now the fathers of those boys were angry. "Are your heads as empty as old gourds?" they said. "Throw away those worthless spears and those bent darts. If you keep using those foolish things, you will all be eaten by hungry animals."

Those boys were pretty unhappy. They met out in the jungle, there were no men to hear. There were twenty of them, their names were:

Wukool, or Seven Thoughts
Oxtulkis, or Three Farter
Hunuhatz'chak, or First Lightning
Chinga'anak', or Broken Tongue
K'uk'umatlatla, or Feathered Spear Thrower
Huumchakximbal, or Thunder Walker
Iktz'ib, or Written in the Wind
Chanka'ay, or Little Song
Yaxch'ok, or New Sprout
Ikak'ot, or Wind Dance
Huumchak-kal, or Thunder Voice
Seektok, or Fast Flint
Batzk'aay, or Howler Song
Chank'iik, or Little Blood
Ki'ix, or Thorn
Chacnik, or Red Flower
Hoitz, or Five Essence
Mehenpech, or Little Tick
Ekpiitoo, or Black Flute
Sakoch, or White Opossum



“Our fathers will never teach us to become men,” one of the boys said. “They don’t want us to be strong.”

Another boy said, “Then we should learn to hunt and fish on our own. We should build our own huts.”

One of the boys saw more clearly than the others. His name was Wukool, and he said, “We cannot let our fathers know we are learning such things. They will grow jealous and move against us. We will have to learn out here, first.”

“That is right,” said the others. “We’ll do that.”

Now, those boys were not alone in that place. Far over their heads hung camazotz’, the death bat, one of ah-Puch’s hungry servants. He heard the words of those boys and said to himself, “Here is a chance to plant some black seeds.” He dropped down through the trees and caught a branch over the heads of those boys.

“Well now, you youths,” said that wicked creature. “I think you will all die in the jungle, that is what you’ll do. It was Sun himself who taught your fathers how to live. How will you learn that on your own? Are you as clever as the gods? Listen, and I will tell you what you can do.”

“Who are you?” said that clever boy. “Why should we listen to you?” No one could see camazotz’, up in the branches. They just heard a disembodied voice.

“I am only a spirit who has seen some things in this world,” said the wicked one. “I have seen hunters torn by balam, the jaguar. I have seen men bitten by kan koch, the fer-de-lance, and die writhing. This does not have to be your path. You can be wiser than those men.”

The boys liked those words, they wanted to be wiser than their fathers.

The clever boy said, “If you are going to teach us, you must show yourself.”

“Oh, no,” said camazotz’. “I cannot teach you anything. I can only show you the path.”

“Who will be our teacher, then?” said Wukool. He did not want to be tricked.

“One who is wiser than I,” said camazotz’. “Do you wish to seek the



path I speak of?”

“We are not afraid,” the boys said. “Show us.”

“With those words, you have already taken one step onto it. When you leave this clearing, you will see a pathway going into the jungle. Do not make any light there, for balam the jaguar is close and always hungry. Just put your hands on each other’s backs, and walk carefully. You will come to the place where you can learn everything.”

“What is the name of this teacher?” said Wukool. “Where is it he lives?”

Camazotz’ said, “You will find out when you go. Now hurry, or the path will close.” Then he flapped his wings and was gone to tell his master that guests were coming.

The boys took up their weak spears and walked into the jungle, and there it was, a path that had not been there before. It went straight through clearings and swamps, as far as they could see.

“Where does this path go?” said one boy.

“Maybe to a shrine?” another boy said.

“It is unwise to walk such a dark path,” said the clever Wukool. “We should pray to Father Sun for help in becoming men.”

“And where is Father Sun now?” said one of the boys. “If this is not his path, why has he not sent someone to show us a better way?”

“Maybe he does not care,” someone else said.

So those boys stood there arguing until thorn-vines grew up on the sides of the path and began to squeeze it closed.

“I am going,” said one boy. “I am not waiting for Father Sun or my own father to teach me. I want to see what is here, now.”

“I am going, too,” said another boy, and he, too, walked that path. And one by one the other boys stepped onto the path, until they all were there. Then it closed behind them, there were curved thorns as long as a man’s hand. The boys walked for a long time, and then the way became so dark that they could not see each other, everything was just as camazotz’ had said. Each boy put his hands on the back of the boy in front of him and went ahead. All around them they heard claws ripping bark and teeth crunching bones. That was balam’s place along the trail,



and the boys walked slowly and made no sounds.

The trail ended at a hut as large as a village, made entirely of bones. Lord Jaguar sat on the roof of this place and cracked skulls in his teeth, but he did not speak to those boys. He barely glanced at them at all. ah-Vidaz stared from the doorway and flicked his tongue. Spirits floated around the clearing that surrounded the bone hut, their task was to sprinkle blood into fires that burned here and there. They dipped their fingers into gourds full of blood and flicked drops into the flames. Five was the number of spirits, these were their names and titles: Ojoik the child-fever wind, Hulnecocik the animal-biter wind, Uayektunik the delirium wind, Mauenelik the insomnia wind, and Olxeik the dry-heaves wind. Here was the rest of their task: those spirits whispered curses and threats into the rising smoke, to be carried to Father Sun. It was the burnt blood of Father Sun's murdered children that lifted ah-Puch's hatred.

"This is ah-Puch's palace," said Wukool. "We were tricked. This is a place of madness, and death."

"We have to run," said the other boys, but they could not move. They were too frightened. Their legs were shaking.

A voice from the doorway of the bone hut said, "You have just come to my palace, and already you talk of leaving?"

Those boys were afraid to look at the doorway. Only the clever boy looked, he alone saw the broken face of ah-Puch.

"Tell me, before you run away, why did you come here, if you did not want to meet me?"

"We only came to learn a few things, oh lord," said the boys. They looked at the ground and mumbled their words, they were some mutterers all right.

"Your feet have found the best path, then. There are many things to learn, in this place."

"Truly, great lord," said Wukool, "We are only foolish boys who have lost our way. We must return to our own fathers now."

"Oh, yes," said ah-Puch. "Surely your own fathers will teach you everything you want to know." When he said these words, his spirit-servants laughed and spattered more blood into the fires. Great clouds



of burning smoke rose into the black sky of that place.

The other boys pushed the clever boy away. "He does not speak for us," said one of the boys. "We are here because there are many things our fathers would not teach us. We will be boys all our lives, if we must wait for them."

"Can your own fathers not see that you are nearly men?" said ah-Puch. "Surely they are not so blind."

One boy said, "We do not ask so much. We want to be hunters and fishermen, that is all. We want to build huts and chop out canoes."

"Boys, these are only the first things you can learn here."

Now the boys looked at the lord of the night and saw his broken face. But they were not afraid. They knew what they wanted from him, they were ready to begin. "Teach us, oh, lord," was what they said.

"And what of you?" said ah-Puch to the clever boy. "Or will you alone remain a boy, the only one in your village?"

"I, too, wish to learn," said Wukool.

So it was that ah-Puch taught those boys to be men. He did this personally, no servants taught them. He wanted to infect them, himself.

And this is how it began, the corruption: ah-Puch took up a core of black obsidian and chipped away blades and points, he showed them everything. He cut a slender branch and shaped it into a shaft for a dart, and he attached the feathers, and he hurled the dart with a spearthrower so that it punched into a tree. Then the boys took their turns cutting and shaping wood, in the hissing light of the blood-fires. They took turns chipping obsidian and flint. When they finished, ah-Puch picked up their dart shafts and looked at them, and if they were crooked or weak, he threw them into the fire. He took up their dart tips, and if they were badly shaped, he snapped them in his fingers.

When the boys asked for something to drink, ah-Puch's spirit servants brought vases full of something red and steaming. But the boys were afraid of that red drink and did not want it. They drank water from puddles, instead. When they were hungry, they asked for food, and ah-Puch's servants brought them strange meat. They did not know the smell



of that stuff and did not take it. They had nothing to eat, and their stomachs rumbled and growled. But those boys did not feel hunger. They were busy chipping stone. They were busy stripping branches and preparing feathers.

At first the boys had no skill, and everything they made was snapped and burned. Those fires devoured everything. Then one boy made a sharp dart tip, and it was not broken. Another boy made a straight dart shaft, and it did not go into the fire. After a time every boy had twenty perfect darts. Then ah-Puch showed them how to carve the hard wood of the coroboro tree into atlatls to hurl their darts. They had to start carving all over again, with hard wood. When they were finished, ah-Puch took their atlatls and tested them, and when the weak ones bent or broke, he threw them into the fire. Those boys had to carve many atlatls, to get it right.

“Now you chip stone and carve wood like men,” ah-Puch said. “But do you hunt like men? Let us find good meat to still the rumbling in your bellies.” The boys took up their atlatls and followed him into the jungle.

All was darkness, all was night. Mother Moon’s face was at the corner of the sky, small and dim, she could not see what ah-Puch was doing. He led them far away from his clearing, to a river, where haleu the paca, lived. He showed those boys how haleu makes his burrows, many holes plugged with leaves. He showed them how to grind their teeth to call to haleu. When haleu put his nose out of those holes, ah-Puch said, “Now, boys! Strike now!”

Those boys hurled their darts, but they did not know what to do. Darts flew like drunken toucans into the river and the trees and the sky. But one dart pierced haleu’s face. Another pierced his heart. The boys dragged him out of his burrow and tied his body to poles and took him back to ah-Puch’s cleaning. There they skinned that body and spitted the meat on sticks and had a great feast. There was enough meat for all the boys, and for ah-Puch, and even some for ah-Balam, who took his raw. That was how fat haleu was. When they were finished they gave the bones to ah-Puch’s spirits, who sucked the marrow from them. Not one shred of haleu remained.



“This is good,” said that clever boy, Wukool. “But we have hunted only one animal. We have only made atlatls and darts. What of spears? What of all the other animals that there are to hunt? Will you not teach us these things?”

ah-Puch turned his face from those boys. “You are the children of my brother, and have I not provided for you like any good uncle? Now you ask for more, but you offer nothing.”

Truly those boys were unhappy. They were afraid ah-Puch would put them to some terrible work. But had they not accepted his teachings? Was he not teaching them well?

“You have our thanks for all you have done for us, oh lord,” said Wukool. “We are only ashamed for our weakness. What can we do for such a powerful teacher?”

“It is true that you are feeble, but this will not always be. I can teach you strength, if you are willing to learn.”

“I will learn,” said another boy. “I want to be stronger than my father. Then I will go back to the village and belittle him, as he did me.” All the boys nodded.

“Good,” said ah-Puch. “And you will not turn away my food and drink?”

“Surely it is wiser if we eat the animals we hunt?” the clever boy said.

“Hungry boys throw like fools,” said ah-Puch. “Didn’t you see that this very day? I will not take starved fools to hunt again. You were fortunate you did not kill each other this morning.”

One of the boys said, “Teach me the rest of the things I need to be a man, and I will walk your path.”

All those boys nodded, even Wukool moved his head. “Show us.”

“Good,” said ah-Puch. “Sleep now. Tomorrow you learn to make spears.” Then he left the boys to sleep on mats by the fires.

The clever boy said to the others, “That meat will make us sick. That drink will poison our hearts. When those servants give us refreshments, only pretend to drink. We can take water from vines, later. When those servants give us meat, only pretend to eat it, and throw it in the fire. We will have meat, when we hunt. Let us learn all we can here. Then



we will return to our village, without poison in us.”

“This is good,” said the other boys. “We will fool this lord.”

But those boys were not alone, by the fire. ah-Kan Koch, the fer-de-lance, lay under one of the mats. He took their words straight to ah-Puch.

“Those boys are such funny little tricksters,” said the night lord. “Tomorrow we will set them beneath us, for good.”

The next day ah-Puch brought cores of red chert from his hut. “Today you learn to make spears,” he said to them. “Now you will truly be my work sons.”

He showed those boys how to flake pieces of red chert from the cores and to chip them into spear heads. He showed them how to flute the edges of those spear heads and how to chip blood channels in them. Then he showed them how to shape a strong spear shaft from the nargusta tree. “Now you try, boys.”

Those boys tried to make spear heads, but they were not wise. They only broke the points.

“Ah,” said ah-Puch. “It is because hunger gnaws your bellies that you are failing.” He called to his spirit-servants, and they prepared meat for those boys. They tore chunks of raw flesh into small pieces and put them in bowls. They filled vases with more red, steaming liquid.

Wukool said, “Surely we cannot stop when here is so much to learn.”

“Oh, we will not stop,” ah-Puch said. “My spirits will feed you while you shape stone. You can drink when you rest.”

Well, what could those boys do? They said they would not refuse ah-Puch's drink and food. So those servants put pieces of meat in their mouths. Those servants gave them sips of red liquid. Those boys did not know that meat was the flesh of a hunter whom ah-Puch's servants had killed. They did not know that the drink was the blood of a young woman, murdered near her parent's hut. They only knew that their stomachs grew heavy, and cold. They only knew that their hearts ached. Even that clever boy had to eat that flesh and drink that blood.

But ah-Puch did not let those boys be sick. He had them chip chert.



He took their ugly points and snapped them and threw them in the fire. He just humiliated the boys until they became wiser. Then one of the boys made a perfect spear head, and ah-Puch put him to making a shaft for it. Another boy made a perfect spear head, and he, too, began making a shaft. Finally all those boys had one perfect spear head and one perfect spear shaft. ah-Puch gave them sinew from coh, the puma, and they bound their spear heads to their shafts.

"Now you have men's spears," said ah-Puch. "But they are dry spears. They have never licked blood. We must hunt something big, and strong, so that you can give your spears their drink." He took up his black-headed spear, which is named Ektok, and led those boys out of the clearing. They followed him into the jungle.

Outside that clearing, the world was in darkness. Mother Moon's face was almost hidden. She did not see what those boys were doing. ah-Puch took them through the jungle to a slow place in the river.

"Now listen, boys," he said. "Tonight we do not hunt for meat. Your bellies are full of meat, are they not? Tonight we hunt balam, the jaguar, as only your boldest fathers do."

"Yes," said those boys. "We will be men when this night is over."

Only the clever boy was not pleased. "Oh, great lord," he said, "Is balam not one of your own servants? Will this be the night we earn the hatred of a thousand jaguars?"

"Ah," said ah-Puch, "It is you again." He smiled, and in the darkness, his mouth looked like the black place in the sky. "Here is how it is with ah-Balam, boys. In the beginning of time all the animals decided who their lords would be, but ah-Balam would not choose. He said, 'I will serve whomever I wish and not declare a single lord.' So sometimes his children serve me, and sometimes they serve my brother, and sometimes they serve Moon. This jaguar we hunt tonight serves no one, so our spears shall prick his skin."

Even the clever boy was pleased at these words. Only a few men wore an armband of balam's hide. How the faces of their fathers would redden when the boys returned with such armbands!

"Here is what we will do," said ah-Puch. "In the night balam walks



the trails looking for homtochac the armadillo and ceh the red deer. We will wait until he comes this way. Strike fast, or he will tear you.”

So those boys hid behind the trees. Many animals used that trail, and the boys let them pass. Only cabcoh the kinkajou saw the boys, but she said nothing. She just sucked on fruits, and watched.

In the grey hour before Father Sun showed his face, balam walked the trail. He did not come alone but in two, he-balam and she-balam. They came like a puff of air, that was their way, those boys did not even notice them. It was only when ah-Puch said, “Now, boys!” that they understood that balam was passing by. They jumped out and jabbed with their spears, and balam was pierced. But those two were not defeated easily. They roared and snarled and clawed the boys. He-balam ripped them in the legs, in the belly. She-balam bit their knees and thighs. Two boys were killed, it happened that quickly, they were just torn open and bled out. There was blood all over, that night.

“Stab him in the heart!” one of those boys shouted, and he stabbed with his spear but missed.

“Pierce his head!” shouted a second boy, but he missed balam and pierced his own foot. There he stood, with his foot held to the ground, while balam ripped and tore his legs.

“Jab his stomach, spill his insides!” a third boy called out, and he jabbed at she-balam but only cut her tail. She turned and clawed that boy’s face. From that day, he was a three-scarred hunter.

Wukool did not stab, he was no blind thruster. He stepped away from the other boys, onto the trail. When he-balam broke away and ran down the trail, that clever boy stabbed him through the throat, and that was the end of him. His wife heard him choke, and she stopped fighting. She just let the boys kill her.

Now those boys laughed and told each other they had at last become men. They took out knives to cut strips of hide for armbands.

“Wait,” said ah-Puch. “There are things to do and words to say. You must celebrate your hunt like men. Bring them over here.”

The boys took he-balam and she-balam to a clear place on the trail and gathered around ah-Puch, who said, “You must dip your fingers in



balam's blood, and touch that blood to your own mouth. Do not drink it; just touch it to your lips. Then say these words:

This is our blood, hide and flesh

This is the road of black spots, and teeth

Our spirits are one in the darkness

"When you say these words, you show your respect. It is a foolish hunter who does not say the words before he returns to his village. The spirit of dead balam will return for such a blasphemer."

The boys dipped their fingers into balam's wounds and touched the blood to their lips, they said the words ah-Puch had given them. All of them said those words, even that clever boy wanted to show proper respect. None of them knew that they were false words that called the spirit of dead balam into themselves, through their bloody mouths. Whenever they hunted, it would be hunger for blood alone that drew them to the jungle.

"Now we can return," ah-Puch said, and he led the boys back to his palace. When they were seated around a fire, the lord of the night brought out skinning knives of yellow obsidian and gave one to each boy.

"Cut slowly and carefully," he said. "You will be wearing your mistakes."

So the boys cut strips of hide off dead balam, and they tanned those strips and sewed them into armbands. Most of the boys nicked theirs, here were a few tattered rags, but a few boys made good armbands. The clever boy was one of those, Wukool used his knife like a man.

"Good," said ah-Puch. "Now it is time to feast and let some blood."

His servants came with bowls of meat and vases of the red drink, and those boys feasted. They did not care what that meat was, did not care what was in the vases. They had hunted balam, and they felt strong.

Then ah-Puch brought out thorn lancets, and the boys pierced themselves and let blood. All those boys stabbed themselves through the foreskin and dripped onto copal incense.

"This is your sacrifice, for luck in the hunt," said ah-Puch. "Toss the incense into the fire, and say these words:



Hear me now, lord
Of the hunt, of the darkness
Walker in shadows, taker of blood
This is my essence
My substance, my sustenance
Given to you, for guiding my spear

“Never forget to thank the lords of the hunt, boys,” said ah-Puch. “Or your spear and your darts will miss their mark. Even when hunting haleu, remember to say the words.”

The boys did not want to say those words, they were not fooled. They knew who the lord of the darkness was. It was ah-Puch they were thanking, ah-Puch who was taking their sacrifice. It was Father Sun whom they wanted to hear their prayers, but what could they do? Who had taught them to make spears and to hunt? So they said the words and threw the incense into the fire. Even the clever boy had to say those words. He was defeated again, and tied to the night.

“It is time for rest,” said ah-Puch. “You have hunted balam, and you have become as great as your fathers. When you wake, I will do as I promised and teach you things that even your fathers do not know.” He took his spear and went into his hut, and those boys went to sleep in the clearing, with all those wicked spirits.

Only Wukool could not sleep, he only pretended to rest. “Truly, Father Sun,” he whispered, “I do not want to learn these things ah-Puch speaks of. I am a hunter today, but what will I be tomorrow?” But Father Sun could not hear those words, in ah-Puch’s place. None of the gods or goddesses could hear. “I know now, Father Sun,” he said. “We should have made sacrifices and asked for your help in becoming men. But we were impatient and went down this other path. What will become of us?” But Father Sun could not answer him. Only the fires hissed, as spirits flicked blood into them. Only the air whispered, as camazotz’ the vampire bat flew in and out of that cleaning.

When the boys woke, ah-Puch was waiting for them. He had brought strange things out of his hut and set them next to the fires. There were teeth from ah-Balam the jaguar. There were scales from ah-Kan koch,



the fer-de-lance. There were three skulls from people, one man and one woman and one child. Next to these things was a great dish full of steaming red drink.

“No food this morning, boys,” said ah-Puch. “Today there is only this drink, to cleanse your blood. Come, stand before these things I have placed on the ground. It is time for you to begin learning the wisdom that will make you greater than your fathers.”

Those boys did not wish to stand before ah-Puch’s things, they only shuffled their feet. All of them felt sickly, and weak. It was ah-Puch’s poisoned food and drink, doing that. None of them stepped forward.

The lord of the night said, “Ah, I know what is wrong. You feel a twisting in your bellies, you feel cold in your hearts. Is this not so?”

Those boys did not speak, but they stopped rustling and listened.

“Do you think it will be easy to become greater than your fathers? When you return and tell them you have made your own spears and hunted balam, do you think they will be pleased? No! They will be jealous. They will be angry. They will raise spears against you. That is the cold you feel, that is the twisting you feel, the truth gnaws your belly. You must learn more, so that you can defeat your fathers and take your place in the village. If you are not strong, those men will take your new spears and darts and break them and burn them. Is this not so?”

“Yes,” said one of the boys. “That is what my father will do. He told me he would break any spear I made. Those were his words.”

But the clever boy knew ah-Puch was only tricking them; he would never teach them anything without taking in return. So he said, “But, lord, we have defeated balam. What is left to learn?”

“You are hunters now,” said ah-Puch, “But you are not warriors. Men are stronger than jaguars, you see what I’m saying? When you return to your fathers, you must know how to defeat them, and they are harder to fight than any animal. It is this lesson that I will teach you.”

The clever boy said, “Truly, lord, it is always pleasing to learn new things. But perhaps we are strong enough to return to the village and take our places as men. Perhaps our fathers have learned wisdom of their own, since we have been gone these several days.”



“Your fathers have learned nothing,” said ah-Puch. “My servants have been listening to them. They are pleased that you have disappeared into the jungle. They liked you when you were small, and weak, those were their words. In the night they speak with your mothers about making new sons to take your places.”

Now those boys were angry. Even Wukool was angry. “We will see who takes my place,” he said. That was how he was defeated, it wasn’t so difficult for the lord of the night to bring him down a bit.

“This is the last thing I have to teach you,” said ah-Puch. “When you have learned this, you will be ready to return to your village.”

The boys were pleased to hear those words and said nothing more.

“Let us begin, then,” said ah-Puch. “Take one of these scales from ah-Kan koch, and place it on your tongue. Do not swallow it. Then take one of these teeth from ah-Balam and pierce your bellies, in the place where you and your mother were joined. Push it into your flesh until it disappears. Let the blood flow, we will stop it later.”

So, each boy placed a scale on his tongue and closed his mouth. It just stayed there, tasting like dirt. But on each boy’s heart, scales grew, and the fear went out of them. They were no longer afraid of ah-Balam, or the spirits, or ah-Puch, or their fathers. Like the fer-de-lance, they feared nothing.

Then each boy pushed one of ah-Balam’s sharp teeth into his own flesh. All those boys were pierced and bleeding. When they pushed those teeth into their bellies, they forgot the faces of their mothers. That was what ah-Puch’s magic did to them.

“Good,” said ah-Puch. “Tell me, do you feel sick? Do you feel cold?”

The boys could not speak, so they shook their heads.

ah-Puch said, “Now, before your bleeding stops, take up your spears and come over here.”

The boys did as he said and stood before the skulls of the man, woman and child. Those were the remains of people from an earlier creation, the ancestors of the first people in this world.

“See how these old bones grin at you?” said ah-Puch. “These people are dead, but still they want to make you cower. This is what you must



do: you must strike each skull with the butt of your spear. Then the dead will respect you and quit trying to frighten you.”

Those boys raised their spears and cracked them down on the skulls. The skulls broke into splinters, and the boys pounded those splinters into the dirt. They destroyed their ancestors, there by the fires.

“Yes,” said ah-Puch. “Warriors do not fear the living, or the dead. Now, spit out those scales on your tongues. Spit them into the fire, and let them burn.”

The boys spit the scales into the fire, and the smoke from their burning became many tiny fer-de-lances, climbing into the sky. They were going to the garden of the gods to hunt the babies of Father Sun.

Lord Jaguar jumped down from his place on ah-Puch’s roof and came to those boys. “You are bleeding,” he said. “Let me heal these wounds.” He licked each boy’s belly, and each navel disappeared. His tongue tickled them, as their mothers had tickled them when they were babies. When the boys looked at ah-Balam, they thought he was their mother.

“Well, we should get going,” said ah-Puch. “There is a long path to walk today, and you must be strong. Drink this, and you will receive strength.” He lifted the bowl of steaming red essence and handed it to the clever boy, who took a drink and gave a cry and ran around like a crazed man.

“I am ready to run all the way to the fifth world,” Wukool said, and then he handed the bowl to the next boy, and they drank. That bowl was full of ah-Puch’s blood. He had let blood that very morning, and it was his strength those boys were taking. In that way ah-Puch became their father, his blood drowned out the essence of the men who made those boys.

After the boys drank the blood, ah-Puch said, “Take up your spears and your atlats, and let us go.” He led them to a new path that opened at the edge of his clearing, and they entered onto it. That trail was barely wide enough for the boys to walk one behind the next.

All that day the night lord led them along his path. They walked through thickets and thorn-patches and shadows. Sometimes they could see Father Sun’s light shining into clearings, but they didn’t go to those



places. The boys never stopped, never rested, but they did not tire. The blood they had taken into themselves filled them with strength. And this was the new shape of the boys: they became hairy, and their bodies grew heavier, they were more like jaguars than men.

At the edge of the village where the boys lived, ah-Puch stopped. "You are stepping out of the jungle now, but my path will always be under your feet, you have only to step onto it when you wish. When you are back with your fathers, do what must be done to put yourselves over them. Remember the skull-breaking, remember the strength of your spears. That is the warrior way, it is the secret even your own elders do not possess." Then ah-Puch stepped into the shadows, he went back to his own place.

"Come out!" those boys shouted into the village. "Come out and see us now! We did not die in the jungle. We did not run away! We have returned as men, to build our own huts and take our own wives!" So those boys said, as they walked into the village. They raised their spears and roared like balam, they hurled darts into the walls of the huts.

But no one came outside, no voices were raised to greet them. All the doorways were covered by night-cloths.

"They see our armbands," said the boys. "They see our strength, and they cower. Come out!"

But there were no people in the huts. The boys went to every hut in the village, even the council house, and there was no one in any of those places. Father Sun had told everyone to leave, because ah-Puch was sending the boys to do some wicked thing. Now those boys shrieked and snarled. They tore down roof beams and house posts. They broke plates and cups and bowls. They kicked holes in the walls.

"Come back!" shouted the boys. "We will show you who is stronger!"

All that noise rose up to Father Sun, who was just appearing at the edge of the world. He saw those boys and heard their shouting. He saw the changes ah-Puch had made in them and saw them breaking the things he had taught the people to make. He looked at those boys and said,

"Put down those spears, show me your faces. What did my brother do to you?"



Those boys turned their faces upward, but they were not respectful. They did not say prayers or make sacrifices. They raised their spears. They hurled darts at Father Sun's face.

"My brother has made you into broken men," said Father Sun. "Now you are full of poison, and it is too late to teach you anything. Burn, then, and let your mothers and fathers begin anew."

He poked at the boys with his flaming spear, and burnt them to ash. Everywhere there were little piles of ash in the shape of men. Even their bones burned. Only the scales on their hearts remained, only the teeth of ah-Balam that they had pushed into their bellies were whole.

Far away in his palace of bones, ah-Puch and his servants saw Father Sun strike down those boys. They saw how their tricks caused so much destruction, and they laughed until tears ran down their faces. Even ah-Balam and ah-Kan koch laughed when those boys burned.

"How amusing!" said ah-Balam.

"It would have been better if their fathers had been speared," was the grumbling of ah-Kan koch. "It is so pleasant to see Sun's children kill each other."

"It was best to see my brother torch his own children," said ah-Puch. "And look, he did not get them all. We may have new servants, yet."

His words were true. A few boys were not burned. They were hiding in the bushes when Father Sun sent down his fire, and when he took away his fierce heat, they ran into the jungle. There were three of them, they were Oxtulkis the Three-Farter, Ekpiitoo the Black Flute, and Chinga'anak' the Broken Tongued. From that time they served ah-Puch. They became men who went to villages where people had become weak or careless and bent them to ah-Puch's way. That became their place in this world.

After Father Sun hid his face for the day, Mother Moon rose and saw the ashes in the village.

"Look at that!" she said. "My husband burned those boys without talking to me. It is not right that their parents should grieve, their brothers and sisters should grieve." So she called some of her children to her, and



they looked at the dead boys and discussed what to do with them.

“We must destroy those scales and teeth,” said ah-Kawil of the lineages. “They have tainted the blood and broken the line.” He called forth sakekchan the tiger ratsnake and ekha’chan the black water snake, those serpents came out of the streams and took away the scales and teeth that had been in the boys. They took those things to the cenotes and spat them in, to sink down and vanish.

“The river can wash away the poisoned blood that was in them,” said ix-/ah-Xp’enkin, the ladylord of time. “It will cleanse them of the taint.” So the ashes of the boys were placed in the river, where they were made clean. Then Mother Moon shed her blood into the water, and those boys were restored to life. And it is true that they were shivery on the river bank, they could not stand but only squatted or were on their knees, their time in death had tired them greatly.

ah-Itzamna of the first ways told those boys, “You cannot go around smashing the bones of your ancestors. It is their faces that you wear and their blood that fills your hearts.” Then he taught those boys the holy days when the ancestors are honored, and he taught them the words to say and the sacrifices to make. And those boys, they learned, they were not foolish. They were hungry for the teachings of the gods and the goddesses and were nourished by their lessons.

“One last thing, we are nearly done,” said ah-K’oxol, the dwarf-teacher. And here was a mistake by a boy, there was laughter because of the small size of the dwarf, and his hair tied back in a tail, and his red face. And ah-K’oxol laughed in return and slapped that boy on his head, it’s true that sense entered into that fool in this way, what idiot laughs at a god, in his face? “You can’t just run around killing animals, especially jaguars,” he said to them. “You must say prayers to their lords, not false prayers but true ones, and you must give sacrifices for the flesh you are about to pierce.” He swung his axe right in those boys’ faces, that swooshing sound woke them right up so they listened and heard plenty fine. Prayers and sacrifices, right, right, right! were the words of the boys, it’s true they didn’t forget after that.



Now all the other people came back to the village, here are the sisters of the boys, and their worried mothers, and their nervous fathers.

“We were crazed,” said those boys. “But Mother Moon and her children have taken away the wickedness ah-Puch put in us.”

“There is one more thing,” said the lord of travels, ah-Ekchuah is this sad god’s name. “You must prepare your dead for the journey to the fifth world.” So he made a path to the place where the boys died fighting he-balam and she-balam, and the boys brought back the bodies of their fallen ones. They washed the dead boys, and their clans made a great feast for them, this is what the god told them to do. All the people in the village sang their names and remembered those boys. Then the priest placed kernels of maize in their mouths, so they would have something to eat on their journey. He placed a droplet of jade in there as well, to sprout them in the garden of the gods. The fathers of those boys put their bodies on great piles of dried wood and set them aflame, so their souls would rise with the smoke. That’s how it was done.

Then the gods and goddesses said their farewells and returned to the fifth world, and the first boys took places as men.

Here is how it ends, the boys dance in a full circle: there is clasping of arms between sons and fathers, the stupid mistakes are thrown down and trampled. The elders taught their sons to grow maize and to make proper sacrifices to the gods and the goddesses. They taught them to sit in the council house and listen to the wisest discuss what needed to be done. They taught them pipes, and drums, and turtle shells. They taught them to fell trees and make huts. So it was that those boys left behind ah-Puch’s teachings and became proper men who were able to take wives and have children of their own.

