

## The War Between the Cities

In the early days of the creation the city of our fathers and the white stone city of the northern mountains were as one. The farmers of the valley traded maize to the white stone farmers and received the fattened fruits of the high places for their own tables. The merchants of the two cities exchanged gold and white jade, and the sons of the lords together hunted ceh the red deer and balam the jaguar. The white stone and green stone sorcerors walked the roads between worlds and gave to their lords the healing ambers and seeing-crystals they found in their travels. The priests of Ch'ulwitznal and Saktun-nal visited each others' shrines and temples and burned copal for the sustenance of gods and goddesses.

Even in those times ah-Puch was strong in the world, and his servants hunted our fathers in the jungle, in the mountains, on the rivers. No place was safe, even in the houses and palaces people were clawed and poisoned. The lords of the cities saw that ah-Puch's desire was to drag them down and bring ruin to the world, and in the light of Father Sun and Mother Moon they declared themselves to be the enemies of the night. It was the warriors of the two cities who raised darts against crocodiles and plague-birds, it was the warriors who raised shields against the jaguars and bandits and crazy men who served the night. The white priests and the green priests captured ah-Puch's death-spirits and burned them to ash in the fires of sacrifice. For many months these men scoured the valley and the mountains for wickedness, their obsidian brought low many foul things and left clean light behind. So it was that the servants of the lord of the night were forced from the valley and pushed out of the mountains, and the cities and fields became safe at last.

In the time right after ah-Puch's servants were driven away, many babies were born, and they became men and women of vision. Fields and orchards grew fat, and heavy were the baskets of the fishermen and carrying-poles of the hunters. The priests prayed and kept the days, always they dropped pine pitch and flowers into the holy fires. The men of power burned their own blood and had artists carve the temples with the wisdom of Father Sun and Mother Moon. Even ah-Puch was respected, with sacrifices and prayers. Those were the days of jade and cacao, when Father Sun's light reached all places.

It is said that our fathers here in the valley began to think differently, then. "We have become powerful, great in our very beings," the lords of the valley said to each other, in the mat house. "We do not need the white stone people anymore. We can trade with others for obsidian and jade, we'll grow our own strange fruits. If we keep all our maize for ourselves, we can break the white stone people, they will live beneath our sandals."

The king of the green stone city was Chac Pak, "Red Dawn," and he sent for



messengers to take his words to the white stone city. “Tell their lords that maize will be more expensive this year,” he said to the messengers. “Tell them that rats ate too much of the harvest. Everything will cost much more, this year.” In truth the storehouses were bursting with food. The king’s words were the beginning of the little trick our fathers wanted to play on the people of Saktun-nal, the mountain city.

The messengers took the king’s words to the lords of the mountains, who were not pleased. “Have we not traded with the valley people all these many years?” they said. “Have we not been as brothers? Do brothers bleed each other dry? If the sorcerers of the valley cannot keep out a few rats, should we send our sorcerers to make the proper magic?” Those were the words they sent to Ch’ulwitznal with the messengers.

But the hearts of our fathers were hardened toward the mountain people. They raised the price for maize, for squash, for beans. They raised the price for figs and sweetsop, calabash and avocado. They would not sell any chili peppers at all to Saktun-nal. They would not sell even one cacao bean.

“We do not have much, this year,” our fathers said to the Saktun-nal lords. “Maybe next year.”

The king of Saktun-nal, whose name was Ox Tok, “Three Flint,” grew irritated with our fathers. He called to his mat house those merchants who had been to the valley and asked them about the rats that had destroyed so much food.

The merchants shook their heads. “There is no shortage of maize in Ch’ulwitznal, oh lords. Their granaries are full.”

When they heard this, the men of power of Saktun-nal were confused. “We must send some truly sharp-eyed observers,” they said. “We must be certain what is going on down there.” So they sent twenty merchants to trade with the people of the valley, but really those men were spies who were supposed to look in every granary and cooking pot.

Our fathers noticed those men looking, and they laughed. “Good. Now they will understand the place we are giving them in this world.”

But Ox Tok and his lords did not see things as our fathers did. “The men of the valley have plenty. They just wish to magnify themselves at our expense,” the mountain king said. Blistering was the anger that flowed in his veins. “We will see about that.” So he summoned fifty warriors and four hundred strong laborers to the mat house.

“We have a task for you,” the king said to those men. “This very night, go into the valley. Pull the maize ears right off their stalks and bring them back with you. Fill your bags with fruit and vegetables for our city. Do this, and you will be rewarded with feathers from the green heron, to wear in your headbands on the holy days.”



So those men went down through the mountain passes, with flint knives and net bags. They went into the fields of the valley, and they took the maize. They cut away the squash and severed the beans, everything that was ripe and ready was stripped away. The white stone warriors watched for the warriors of Ch'ulwitznal, but there were none in those little villages at the valley's edge. When the laborers had filled their nets, the mountain people traveled back to Saktun-nal. The lords gave the food to their people, and they awarded the feathers of the green heron to the raiders.

"Now the Ch'ulwitznal men will understand that we will not be cheated," said Ox Tok.

When our fathers heard of the loss of their maize, they met in the mat house to discuss the proper course. "Our little brothers in the mountains have raised their fists against us, with this stealing of our food," they said. "We must beat them down, a little." They called two twenties warriors to the mat house and told them, "Go into the terraced fields in the mountains, and defeat the warriors who guard those places. Leave a chili pepper with each dead man, so that our little brothers know it was not bandits who did this."

That night the two twenties warriors went into the cold mountains and killed the look-outs of Saktun-nal. That was a night Mother Moon's face was hidden, it was a proper night for such killings. The valley warriors went into the small villages and chopped down the warriors who were there to guard against bandits. Two twenties white stone warriors died, and the green stone warriors placed chili peppers in the dead hands. Then they returned to the valley and said, "It is done."

Jade celts were the gifts given to the warriors for the killing of the Saktun-nal citizens. Each warrior received a jade celt with his name carved into the stone, to pass down to his sons.

The lords of the valley talked among themselves, they said, "The mountain people will not be stealing our food, again. Give them time to bury their dead, and then send messengers to tell them that there are not two cities any more but only one, and they must ready themselves to bow to us."

But the people of Saktun-nal were not defeated by the killings or by the hunger in their bellies. They just grubbed for roots, they ate the bitter bark of trees. King Ox Tok said to his warrior-lords, "Take ten twenties warriors and go to the village called Northernmost Place. Kill the men, and bring the women and children back here. If the valley lords want them back, they can buy them."

That night, the warrior-lords gathered their men and went into the valley. They killed all the men in Northernmost Place and took the women and children and all the maize from the granaries. The women of the valley wept for their dead husbands, but the warriors of Saktun-nal grabbed them by the hair and beat



them. They made them walk to Saktun-nal, to be slaves.

Now our fathers were angered. King Chac Pak said to the mat house men, "We thought those mountain people were like us, but now we know that they are vicious. We must treat them like murderers, we must speak to them with flint instead of words."

"Wait," said the high priest. That was K'an Um, Yellow Feather, his title was Jaguar Priest for all the valley. He too, sat in the mat house, his word was prized in all things. "This is the path of thorns we are turning to. Father Sun's light will not shine on us, if we go this way."

"Hmm, and where were the gods when our farmers were killed?" said the warrior-lords. "Where were they when our wives and children were taken away?"

"There was already blood," said the Jaguar Priest. "Our warriors had already darted the people of Saktun-nal. That happened without consulting the priests, or the gods and the goddesses."

"Talk to them, then," said King Chac Pak.

"We will pray," the Jaguar Priest said.

On the day Seven Wind the priests of the valley made their plea.

"Oh Father Sun, oh Mother Moon, hear these words!" chanted the priests, over burning sacrifices. "The men of Saktun-nal have become crazed. They murder our warriors, they steal our people and our food. Won't you help us protect ourselves? Won't you help us to bring back our suffering people?"

It was Mother Moon who heard them, it was she who said, "The men of Saktun-nal have lost their way, but so have you. We gave you rich fields, plentiful rain, clean light and heat, but now you kill your brothers? In your pride you have entered Puch's road, and we can do nothing until you come back to us." It was in a dream she spoke, to the Jaguar Priest.

The priests took Moon's words to the mat house.

"Very well," said the king. "If the gods and goddesses will not bring back our people, we will do it ourselves."

"They will have our people in the heart of their city," said the warrior-lords. "We will never win them back, with spears."

The king sent for his sorcerors, but they could do nothing. "The white stone sorcerors have covered our people up there with mist," they said. "We cannot find them or bring them back, for now."

"Very well," said King Chac Pak. "Then we will appeal to someone we know will hear us."

The mat house was silent, all the powerful men looked at the king. "Clean the masks on ah-Puch's temple, and bloody the fires. Let us see what the lord of the night will say of this matter."

"Yes," said the valley lords. "The king of Saktun-nal will not expect this."



Maybe there is a way to bring back our women and children and defeat the white stone city at the same time.”

Now the Jaguar Priest protested, he tried to raise his voice against this, but the lords told him, “You said yourself that the gods and goddesses will not help us defeat those murderers. We must turn to the night.”

“This path will devour us,” the chilam balam said. “We must turn back to the sun.”

It was the king who struck down these words, he said, “For now we must take any power ah-Puch will give us. When we defeat Saktun-nal, we will leave this road.” So the old priest was silenced, so our fathers embraced the night.

The priests went to the temple of ah-Puch and beautified the masks and the altar. They scrubbed the incensarios and built high the fresh-kindled flames. On the day Three Darkness they nourished the fires with their blood, and they gave incense and cedar chips and prayers. The chilam balam crushed a pebble of yellow jade and a pebble of white jade on the altar, and prayed. When the darkness came, the priests called to ah-Puch.

In the fire light the god showed his face. It was only his teeth and eyes that could be seen, only what gleamed was visible. He said, “I know your sorrows, priests of the valley. Those other gods and goddesses have turned their faces from you, what fickle whiners they are. But you should not have to suffer this humiliation, your request is very reasonable. I have heard your prayers and tasted your nourishment, and I have a gift for you. On the night Five Wind you must climb to the top of my temple and face the mountain city. You must give blood, much more than tonight, and say the words I will give you. They will summon my servants to that city, we’ll give them a reason to respect the power of the valley.” ah-Puch taught them his words and then left them in blackness.

The priests returned to the mat house with their gift.

“This is all we wanted,” said King Chac Pak. “With darkness in our hands, we will humble Saktun-nal. This will all be over soon.”

That very night the valley priests stopped eating chili peppers. Three days later they stopped drinking cacao, and they ate no more maize. It was only water they drank, they took no more food at all. Their blood grew powerful with pure essence. The priests made countless balls of incense for the braziers, and they prepared bloodletters for the day Five Wind.

Our fathers were not alone in speaking to the dark on Three Akbal. That same evening ah-Puch went into the dreams of the Sky Priest of the white stone city, his name was Wak Nikob, Six Flowers, and told him that the men of the valley were calling sorcery against Saktun-nal. Wak Nikob went to the lords of white stone, but they said only, “Do we listen to ah-Puch, now?”



“What if his words are true?” said the Sky Priest. “The other gods and goddesses have stopped answering our prayers, ever since we killed the valley men. What if they favor the valley now?”

Here was a thought the mountain lords didn’t like at all, they didn’t talk long for this one. The mountain king told the Sky Priest, “We must give great sacrifices to the gods and goddesses and ask for their guidance. Take what you need from the treasure rooms of our palaces. Call our wives to sacrifice blood. Call upon us, and you will be drenched with blood sacrifice.”

The mountain priests kindled the sacred fires and threw in copal incense and powdered jade. They burned their blood, and the blood of the wives, and they called the men of power to the temples and burned their blood, too. That was on the day of winds, Four Wind, and the blood-smoke swirled around the temples and roused the gods and the goddesses.

It was ah-Itzamna, that wise old god, who heard the prayers of Saktun-nal and appeared seated on the altar. “Who are you to call to us with your troubles, with your pains? Who are you but brother-killers and child-stealers? What are you asking of those who still live in the light?”

“Wise One,” said the Sky Priest, “Is it true that the valley men prepare sorcery against us?”

“Yes,” said ah-Itzamna. “Great will be your suffering, but we will ease your pains, if you leave the dark.”

“We need strength against the valley,” said the Sky Priest. “We must have great magic.”

“We can grant you nothing, murderers you are now,” said ah-Itzamna. “You know the sacrifices to make, when you want to embrace my father once more.”

The priests took the god’s words to the men of power, who put their faces in their hands.

“Truly we are forsaken,” they said.

“We are not defeated yet,” said king Ox Tok. “If Father Sun and Mother Moon have turned from us for merely defending ourselves, we must clean the temple of ah-Puch and prostrate ourselves before him.”

It was the day Five Caban when the Saktun-nal priests cleaned the temple of ah-Puch and sacrificed their blood. The temple masks were scrubbed and the paint refreshed. The Sky Priest said prayers and gave crushed obsidian, and the younger priests chanted and burned incense. When Father Sun had set and Mother Moon was not yet risen, a stinking mist came from the altar. Then ah-Puch was there, standing with his bone staff in the entrance of his temple.

“Ah,” he said. “You have decided to seek my strength.”

“We must terrify the valley,” said Wax Nikob. “We want them to weep with fear.”

“This is something I can do,” said ah-Puch. “Your gifts are pleasing to me,



and now I have a gift for you. On the night of Five Wind, you must sit at the edge of your city and let the braziers drink deep of your blood. Then say these words, and you will have your terror.” And he taught them a prayer that would make the valley men small with fear.

The priests went to the lords with the power they had received.

“Good,” said Ox Tok. “Soon we will give sustenance, too.” So the lords and the priests of the white stone city began their fasting and abstinence, and they purified their blood.

And then the holy day came, Five Wind it was called. In the valley the green stone priests lit the braziers and prayed, all that day they chanted and bowed. When the night came, they opened their veins above the altar and soaked the hungry stone. A cloud hid Mother Moon’s face, and then the Jaguar Priest of Ch’ulwitznal said the words ah-Puch had given him:

“Rise, little chewers, little gnawers, little biters

Rise from jungle

Rise from swamps

Go to Saktun-nal

Make it your home.”

Across the jungles and swamps of the valley, Lady Insect’s children left their webs and bark holes and swollen leaves and went to Saktun-nal. The people of the mountains heard a tremendous buzzing of wings and clicking of jaws, and they were afraid. Clouds of insects chewed everything—even pottery, even stone. They bit and stung children and sucked the blood of women. They left droppings on the maize. They crawled on babies and itched them til they shrieked. The white stone sorcerers were limp before them, magic was useless against ah-Puch’s spell. Even the lords could only burn green branches, by standing in clouds of smoke those great men remained unbiten. All that night the insects swarmed Saktun-nal, it was Father Sun’s light alone that drove them back into their holes.

Next come the words of the mountain people; they had their own prayers to say on Five Wind. The Saktun-nal priests lit their braziers and bled themselves, and they gave crushed jade and obsidian and pine pitch. When clouds covered Mother Moon’s face, the Sky Priest said:

“Awaken, all you sleepers, flyers, biters

Crawl out of your tree trunks, leaves, caves

Fly this night to Ch’ulwitznal

Suck the ears of the people

Bite the throats of the people

Bring terror to their hearts.”

In the caves and in the trees, ah-Puch’s children heard those words. A



thousand twenties bats flew to Ch'ulwitznal and writhed above the incense burners. They dove into the markets, the plazas, the temples. They went into huts, they went into the mat house, the beating of their wings brought fear to everyone.

"Drive them away!" the valley lords said to their sorcerers, but the sorcerers could not. ah-Puch had sent those fliers, and the sorcerers were not strong enough to defeat them. The bats bit the ears of the people, they tangled their hair. They pushed their wet noses into the skirts of women and into the ears of men, and they bit people and licked the blood. The men of power stabbed at the children of ah-Puch with spears, but there were too many, they were too fast. Only when Father Sun showed his face did they go back to their own hiding places.

The people of the valley cried out to the men of power, "Why have these children of ah-Puch attacked us? Will we be completely drained of blood, next time they come? What will you do to protect us?"

King Chac Pac called the priests to the mat house. "We must know why these children of ah-Puch have come, when we have embraced him. Go to the temples, call to him. Learn why he sends his children."

The priests did as the lords commanded, but ah-Puch did not come right away. It was three days until he appeared; he made our fathers wait before he showed himself and said, "You see how it is with those mountain people? It is their sorcery which roused my children against you. The words you said were strong, and the Saktun-nal lords are afraid, but they are proud. Even now they think up more sorcery."

"We cannot wait for them to send more horrible magic," said the Jaguar Priest of the valley. "We must have stronger words, to defeat them for good."

"Well," said ah-Puch. "There are such words, but they are not so easily given. Go to your lords, and say to them, 'What will you do for the night? He has gifts, but how will you show your appreciation?' You, Jaguar Priest, you know what I desire." And then he was gone again.

When the men of power heard the god's words, they said, "He wants what?"

"He wants the beating hearts of strong men," said the Jaguar Priest.

"Then we will see that he has them," said the king.

This is when the real killing began, to satisfy the hunger of ah-Puch. When Mother Moon was sleeping the warriors of the valley climbed into the passes, they brought clubs and carrying-poles and rope. In the village of Hill House the warriors kicked open the doors and pounded the people senseless and tied them up like animals. Three twenties white stone men were dragged back to the valley and held in pens. On the day Eleven Akbal, when the darkness was strong, the priests sacrificed twenty men on the altar of ah-Puch. They stretched them over the black stone and cut their hearts out and burned them. The Jaguar Priest





called to the god; this time there was no waiting.

“I see your men of power really do want to be the lords of valley and mountains,” said ah-Puch. “They have given me what I desired, and now you shall have what you want. On the day Nine Water, you must climb onto the top of my temple and recite the prayer I will give you. More of your own blood must be shed, and your lords must give, too. The words grow stronger with each sacrifice.” Then he taught words of fierce strength to the Jaguar Priest, and when he left he took the sacrifices back to his palace, to devour.

The valley priests returned to the mat house with the words of the god, and the men of power were pleased. “This time we cannot fail,” they said.

The day Nine Ha’ was many days away, so the priests began gathering incense and scented herbs. They began their fasting and abstinence. They ate only a little maize, drank only water. They stopped eating chili peppers, and they set aside their cigars. They wanted great purity for the speaking of the words.

And this is how the mountain lords also became great murderers: their fear led them to the dark. “Go to the temple,” the lords of Saktun-nal told the priests. “Tell ah-Puch we need words of greater injury.”

The priests prayed and sacrificed, but ah-Puch did not appear. For three days they had to beg him to show himself.

When he arrived, he said, “I see you have not let them defeat you. What is it you want now?”

“Our lords ask for stronger words,” said the white stone Sky Priest. “We want those valley men ground down.”

“A simple thing,” said the god. “But I am hungry after sending my children to the green stone city for you, and you must give me something delicious. Take up this matter with your lords, and call to me on my night, Eleven Akbal.”

The lords of Saktun-nal heard the desire of ah-Puch and said, “In the slave pens and work-pits we have nourishment for him. Let him be filled.”

On the day Eleven Akbal the priests of Saktun-nal put on feather cloaks and dragged their captives to the altar. Twenty women and children shivered in the mountain cold, twenty sets of teeth clacked. The priests prayed, and they dropped copal into the fires. When the day turned to night, they strangled our people with cords, on the black altar. That was the fate of our captured people. The Sky Priest called to ah-Puch, and when he appeared to them, he was smiling.

“Your lords are strong in their desire to punish the valley. On the day Nine Water, sit at the edge of your city and speak down to the valley. I must have blood, and there must be more sacrifices. It is your generosity that decides your strength.” Then he taught his twisted words to the Sky Priest and took our dead ancestors to toy with in his palace, and the priests and lords of Saktun-nal began their prayers and fasting.



Then it was the morning of the holy day, Nine Water, and our fathers lit the incensarios in the temple of ah-Puch. That was a day of clouds and thunder, Father Sun's face was hidden. The lords of the valley came to the temples to cut themselves, they burned blood for the god. The priests gave, too; with obsidian slicers they drained their purified essence into the flames. The Jaguar Priest prayed all that day. Even in the wind, even in the rain, he stood before the altar and said the words ah-Puch demanded to hear.

When the night came, the last two twenties white stone people were brought to the temple. The priests stretched them over the altar, and the Jaguar Priest bled them for the god. Forty white stone people died, forty hearts burned, forty bodies were fed to ain the crocodile, in the river.

The priests climbed the temple and faced Saktun-nal. In the mountains there was rain also, and lightning. Our fathers could see the white stones shining, in the flashes. Now the Jaguar Priest said the words ah-Puch had taught him:

"Hide, waters, streams, rivers  
Hide, lakes, pools, ponds  
Dry up the cisterns  
Dry up the chultuns  
Let there be not a drop, anywhere."

With those words, the mountain clouds stopped dropping rain. The pools and basins soaked into the underworld. All the water that was in the mountains just sank into the ground.

The valley lords said, "Now the mountain people fall."

On that same day came words of retaliation from Saktun-nal; again the white stone priests gave blooded incense. When the sky grew dark, the lords of Saktun-nal had the rest of our ancestors brought from the slave pens. Three twenties women and children stood on the steps of ah-Puch's temple. All those people were strangled and bled, their bodies were put in high places for vultures to eat.

After the killings, the Sky Priest stood at the edge of the cliffs and said ah-Puch's words:

"Rise, hidden waters, and flow  
Fall, sky waters, and rush  
Swell the streams  
Swell the rivers  
And wash away those people."

The clouds over the valley broke open, and all the rain for the mountains and the valley fell into the jungle. The water that had disappeared from the mountains gushed out of hidden streams and sinkholes. The streams frothed, the rivers thundered. Floods smashed bridges and canoes and washed away the raised



fields. Villages were buried in mud, many people were churned and drowned. The river roared into the green stone city and covered plazas and houses and markets in mud, and fifty twenties people died.

These are the faces of the lords of the valley, after the flood: they grieve. Tears are on their cheeks; they are listening to the sorcerors, who are peering into flames to see far away.

"The floods came from the mountains," say the sorcerors. "They washed away whole villages. Everywhere there are bodies, our people were buried alive."

It is the king, Chac Pak, who says, "Is your magic strong enough to tickle the lords of Saktun-nal?"

"Not this day, great king," are the words of the sorcerors. "Their priests are ready, their sorcerors are ready. It will be days before thirst weakens them."

"The white stone lords will not be defeated by thirst," are the words of the lords to the king. "They will steal from our rivers, steal from our cisterns. This was strong magic, but they will work around it."

"We must take our men into the mountains," say the warrior-lords. "We must plant our sandals on their faces, or this killing will never end."

"Here is what we will do," are the words of Chac Pak. "Prepare the warriors. Prepare the sorcerors. This time, I will stand before the god with the Jaguar Priest. This time, we will ask for words of fiercest power."

And here are the preparations of the valley warriors: they make many quivers of darts, many spears. Every warrior makes a new axe of hardest stone. They bring out their headbands and armbands and war sandals. They ready their shields and armor and feathers. They bring out the crests of their families and their clans, and they bloody their skin with new tattoos.

"We are ready to go to the mountains," are their words to their lords.

And here is what happens in the palace of the sorcerors, on the island Hun Nal. The men of secrets gather their herbs and poisons and shining crystals. They dig up the bones of dead murderers, for making curses. They collect red feathers and orange feathers to start fires in Saktun-nal, and they harvest the roots of the tzibche, to give teeth to the wind.

"We are ready to shake the white stone city," are the words of the sorcerors.

On the day Eleven Lightning, the king and the Jaguar Priest went with the priests to the house of ah-Puch, all those men bled themselves a little.

"That is enough," said the king. "We give no more until we receive great strength in return."

"Ah," said ah-Puch. He appeared in the temple, seated on the altar with his bone staff in hand. "And what strength is it you want, king of the green stones?"

"No more small words," said Chac Pak. "We want words to snap bones and



bring down palaces."

"You place a heavy burden on me," said ah-Puch, "But I can do this. If you give me what I crave, you shall have words to end the mountain city, forever."

"That is our desire," said the king.

ah-Puch said, "Very well. Here is what my prayer will cost you: I will have sacrifices, from your own people. Twenty young women will be strangled at my altar. Twenty children will have their bellies opened. Twenty women with infants in their wombs will die by beatings from the priests. These things can not occur in this old, ugly temple. Five new temples must be built, one in each direction. On the day Thirteen Akbal, my strongest day, you must give these sacrifices in the morning darkness. That is only fifteen days from now, I want to see some sweat. If I receive these gifts, you will be given your words that very morning and use them that very night, and this war will be over. That is my promise."

In the mat house, the Jaguar Priest did not want to pay ah-Puch's demands. "We can send the warriors and the sorcerors to do what must be done in the mountains," he said to the king. "We do not need any more god-words."

"A few warriors and a few sorcerors will not be enough strength," said the valley lords, those powerful men talked the Jaguar priest right down. "As their throats grow parched, their anger will be ferocious. Ours must be the first hit, the hardest hit."

It was the king Chac Pak who raised his voice over the others. "We can use ah-Puch's words and then go back to our old path. We can always leave this road, once the white stone city has fallen."

So this shameful event was brought into being, the priests ordered the selection of the sacrifices. They came from families with no fathers, from broken lineages the gods had forgotten. There were twenty young women, twenty children, twenty women with child. They were tattooed with the sign of ah-Puch and given only a little food, only a little water, so their blood would be pure for the god. In the tunnels under ah-Puch's temple they awaited the day Thirteen Akbal, day and night they prayed to Father Sun and Mother Moon.

The valley priests stopped eating; they fasted for fifteen days, and they did not visit their wives or children. They set aside their cacao, and their cigars. And with them were the men of power, all the lords of the valley, drinking only a little water, eating nothing, breathing copal incense and tattooing themselves for the holy day.

Then there was the building of the five new pyramid-mountains and temples to ah-Puch. There were only fifteen days to make them; it was the sorcerors who carried that burden. In their palace they summoned mud-men and told them to go to the eastern mountains and bring black stones to the valley. Forty twenties mud-men went to the quarries and tore out the stones, forty twenties mud-men



shaped the blocks. Great was the strength of the muck-children, they needed no tools or spells but only their fists and their fingers for pinching out and squaring the blocks. Then the mud-men returned to the river, floating the stones on rafts. At the shores it was the sorcerers who lifted the blocks with their magic and pushed them to the places where the temples would stand.

On the east side of the city they built the red temple of darkness.

On the north side of the city they built the white temple of darkness.

On the south side of the city they built the yellow temple of darkness.

On the west side of the city they built the black temple of darkness.

And in the green center of Ch'ulwitznal they raised a final temple of darkness.

It was the sorcerers who built up the pyramids and the temples, they did it through their mud-men, and then the stonemasons fitted the roofcombs together, and the artisans made masks of ah-Puch on the sides of the stairs, with mouths open and teeth ready for blood.

In the mountains, the Saktun-nal men saw our fathers raising the black temples. That was when there was drought in the high places. The crops were dying, the animals were dying, the people were rasping with thirst.

"The lords of the valley are never going to stop," the men of power of Saktun-nal said. "If there is just one valley man alive, he will come to hurl darts at us."

"It is the greatest mysteries of the dark that we must ask for," said the Sky Priest. "The valley must be smothered by the night."

"This time we will assist the underworld," said the mountain king. "It is we who will bring the finish. You priests, go to the temples and ask what the god wants for words to extinguish Ch'ulwitznal. You warrior-lords, ready your men. After these next words, we will go into the valley ourselves. And you sorcerers, prepare your magic to wash away whatever is left, down there."

So the white stone priests stabbed themselves for blood and chanted and built up pillars of smoke, and ah-Puch spoke to them from the shadows of his temple. "You wish to put an end to green stone pyramids and palaces for all time? Yes, that can be done. It is a great burden, but it can be done."

"We will give a river of potent sacrifices," said the Sky Priest.

"Oh, don't worry about that," said the god. "There is another little thing, first. Great words must be said from a great place, not an old, tired temple like this one. In fourteen days' time it will be my day rising, Thirteen Akbal. On that day there must be a new temple, on the western side of your city. It must be high enough to see over all the valley. When it is finished, it is the blood of your sorcerers that will summon me. They must sacrifice in the morning, before the light. Then we will discuss your words."

So this is the raising of the black pyramid, in Saktun-nal. It was the sorcerers who called it into being up there, too. There was no stone cutting, no lifting, no



moving. The sorcerers bled themselves on the ground and called to the spirits of stone, and the black pyramid grew out of the earth. When it rose it was smooth, it was just a dome of black rock. For nine days the sorcerers fasted and sacrificed their blood. For nine days the black pyramid-mountain grew, until it was higher than the other temples. Then its skin cracked, and splinters of sharp stone burst in every direction, and there it was, the highest pyramid-mountain in the white stone city. It had stairways, and an altar, and its masks were the faces of the nine lords of the night, and their father.

When it was finished, there was a surprise. The sorcerers opened their veins to give blood into the mouths of the toothed masks, but that was not what ah-Puch wanted. Out came the tongues of the lords of the night, their masks spat forth scaled tongues and pulled in those men to be shivered in the teeth. There were two twenties sorcerers in Saktun-nal, the masks killed all of them. Only two work-sons survived.

This was when ah-Puch brought himself into the new temple, when all that blood was running down the steps. "Here is what I needed, so tasty," said the god to the Sky Priest and the king of Saktun-nal. They were both there in his temple, to speak to him. "Now I have taken my price; there will be no sorcery in this city except what comes from me. This very evening, sit here before my altar, both of you, and face the green stone city. All you must do is bleed yourself and say a few words. Ready?" And he taught the words to them, but the king could not comprehend them. He just heard wind when ah-Puch spoke, and it was the Sky Priest who received the magic. That was Thirteen Akbal, before the dawn.

Thirteen Akbal was the great day for the valley as well, the green stone priests were preparing their own ferocious magic. They lit the braziers of ah-Puch's five new temples and dropped balls of incense into the fires, nine spheres for each priest, nine for each lord. Then they brought out the sacrifices, their own people kept in the shadows for the unholy day. It is said that the priests trembled when they stretched the children over the altars, even the Jaguar Priest who was old and had made many sacrifices. Those little ones were the first to satisfy ah-Puch's hunger, their bubbling essence was what the god craved.

And then came the killing of the young women, the priests put cords around their necks. All those girls died purple, it was ah-Puch who demanded this.

In the east, Father Sun began to show himself. His light was beginning to come over the mountains, and the priests raised their clubs. The young priests held down the pregnant women, and the oldest priests beat them as ah-Puch had ordained, and their infants died within them.

Then ah-Puch came to his fresh temple, in the center of the city. He appeared before the Jaguar Priest and the king, even as his brother's strength showed itself



over the mountains. When he came he was smiling, and smoking a cigar.

“You will have your words now, right under my brother’s eyes,” he said to Chac Pak and the Jaguar Priest. He reached out with his bone staff and cut their faces, he drew the obsidian end across their skin and brought out their essence. “It is in your blood that you will remember my words, and you must bleed when you say them. You must give nearly everything in you, until you are pale and shaking.” Then he taught them the words, but only the Jaguar Priest understood them. The force of the magic was for him, alone.

This was the city of our fathers under the sun of Thirteen Akbal; there was no one in the plazas, no one in the markets. The men of power fasted in the mat house. The warriors went into the mountains and hid themselves in caves. The priests were in their temples, away from Father Sun’s face. Only the sorcerers were speaking, in their palace on the island Hun Nal; they were discussing their dreams. It seemed to them that their lord, ah-K’awil, had appeared to them and showed them the way to defeat Saktun-nal. They could call the spirits of the living lightning and send those strokes of blue fire into the mountains as assassins. Father Sun had forbidden bringing those spirits into this world, but now ah-K’awil told them that his father would allow it, to end the evil sorcery of Saktun-nal. In truth it was a trick, only ah-Puch was in the dreams of the sorcerers. In his strength he could even appear as one of Father Sun’s own children.

When the day Thirteen Akbal turned to night, the Jaguar Priest and the valley king and the lords of Ch’ulwitznal met at the altar of ah-Puch’s green-black temple; the carved stone pooled with blood. The Jaguar Priest began to chant right away, no waiting for the white stone people to strike first:

“Rise, now, swamp-mists  
To the City of White Stones  
Bring coughing and wheezing  
Bring bleeding and weeping  
Bring gagging and wretching  
Until pain chokes them all.”

In the swamps, yellow mist rose from the water. It drifted up the passes and covered Saktun-nal. The white stone people coughed blood. Their noses ran, and their skin oozed, and they teared with pain. The yellow mist choked everyone, a hundred twenties people strangled.

The Jaguar Priest did not stop, did not even pause:

“These are the words for the sinkhole dwellers  
Words for the spirits of the third world, below  
Bring pain to the heads of the White Stone people  
Make cloudy their eyes  
Just loosen their bowels



Let their mouths drool  
Then burst their hearts.”

From the sinkholes, five twenties spirits crawled into this world. They were pale, like yellow fog, and they floated over the ground. Those spirits went into the heads of the Saktun-nal people and made them crazed. They beat their faces against the walls. They gouged their own eyes until blood flowed from them. They slobbered on themselves and squirted diarrhea on the temples and the houses. They giggled and spun in circles until their hearts burst and they died on the paving stones. Then the spirits went into new people and murdered them.

Still it was not finished, the Jaguar Priest spoke to complete the magic:

“These are the final words, words of great power  
Words for the silent ones, deep in the caves  
Rise, cold ones, still ones, silent ones  
Rise and take up your clubs  
Hunt your children  
And your children’s children  
Crush the sprouts of your lineages.”

Those words burned the throat of the Jaguar Priest, they burnt away his tongue so that he never again could speak. In the caves where the ancestors of Saktun-nal lay bundled, those ragged bones rose as though they lived once more. They took up flint clubs and came out of the caves into the white stone city. In the darkness, those twisted ancestors hunted their children’s children. They bashed the heads of infants and broke the ribs of old women. No one could stop them. Only the sorcerors could have stopped that magic, and ah-Puch had devoured the sorcerors. When the warriors cut those old bones, it was their own bones that were severed. When they threw the ancestors on the fires, it was the warriors who burned. A thousand twenties people were killed this way, the White Stone citizens lay in heaps.

Now the valley warriors came out of their caves at the edge of Saktun-nal. In the ravine called Fallen Place the white stone warriors and the green stone warriors met each other, our fathers were really eager to be rid of the mountain people for good. All the warriors were screaming, the mountains boomed with their roars and the zuzzing of darts. Even the warrior-lords fought with their axes, no one stood back from this killing. Dying men fell into the streambeds and rolled down the mountain sides, their broken feathers floated around them.

One more thrust was what the valley king wanted, it was his sorcerors he had asked to scour the white stones so that all enemies fell. But there was a little trick here, a little turnaround by the lord of the night. And this is the destruction of the green stone sorcerors, under the wasp star: they were murdered by ah-Puch. In their palace the sorcerors called the spirits of the living lightning into this world, through pebbles of blue jade. These were the names of the nine spirits:





Thunderbolt and Blinder came as two  
Bright Lightning and Roaring Spark were two also  
Rock Splitter and Blue Runner hunted our ancestors back-to-back  
Brilliant Flash and Water Jumper leapt over each other in eagerness to kill  
Skybreaker came alone

The sorcerors of the valley commanded the spirits to go to the white stone city and let loose their fires, but that was not what happened. Those spirits only laughed, and then they tickled with what was theirs. The sorcerors died; they burst into flames like storm-struck trees and were charred. The lightning-spirits were servants of ah-Puch, and they had not come to the valley to obey our fathers. They went into the streets and murdered our people, instead. Everyone they jabbed burned up and died, five hundred twenties people were incinerated by the crackling spirits. At the mat house the valley lords and the spirits of living lightning found each other, the powerful men of Ch'ulwitznal took up their spears and obsidian swords. The flashes were seen in the farthest villages, the thunder was heard all the way at Fallen Place. Those spirits were powerful, and the lords of the valley were defeated. They were flickered, and they burned. Seven of the lightning spirits were destroyed under the spears of the lords; Brilliant Flash and Water Jumper alone survived. They went into the city and killed our people until Father Sun rose and terrified them into leaving this world.

And here is the second failure of the sorcerors: in Saktun-nal the two white stone apprentices called forth spirits of living darkness. They were going to send the spirits to devour our fathers, but those were ah-Puch's servants from the first days of the creation, very old and powerful, and they were not obedient. These were their names, there were nine in all, they look like black jaguars in the shape of their bodies:

Shadow and Hollow Heart were the first two  
Rustle and Murmur were the second pair  
Frost Maker and Whisper were brothers in the dark  
Last Sigh and Eclipse leapt from branch to branch in the trees  
Star Biter floated overhead like a black cloud and pounced on people

Those black jaguar-spirits came from behind curtains, they came from inside water jars and incense-burners, they clawed out the hearts of the apprentices and crunched their faces. They tore through the white stone city and slashed at everyone, a thousand twenties died under their claws. All the white stone warriors were at Fallen Place, there was no one to challenge the strength of the black jaguars. The lords of Saktun-nal would not fight; the hearts of those men died as their city died, they could not raise their spears.

Now come the words of Saktun-nal, last spoken and last to be heard. The



priests were on the great pyramid-mountain of ah-Puch, looking over the valley, feeding their blood to the night. Above them, on the roof comb, the Sky Priest of the mountains chanted ah-Puch's words:

“Flow, mountain winds  
Without heat, without life  
Down the passes  
Through the valley  
Circle green stones  
Like a serpent  
Squeeze the hearts of those people.”

From the mountaintops came the night winds, slithering down into the valley. Those gusts froze the warriors at Fallen Place; they all died right there, chomped by the cold. Down through the passes, through the jungle the winds whistled; villages were chilled, everyone died shivering in their sleep. It is said that the night winds coiled themselves around the city of our fathers, higher and higher like the timber rattler, the open mouth of the night exhaled the cold between stars onto the temples and the palaces and the houses of the green stone city. Our ancestors built up their fires and prayed for the winds to stop, but they did not. They blew all night and took all the heat, and a thousand twenties people surrendered their lives to those blasts.

Then the Sky Priest called out the next words:

“These are the words of the mountain-top clouds  
The words of the sky, the words of the storm  
Let the swirling air lick  
Ch'ulwitznal  
Nuzzle the houses, caress the temples  
Stroke the palaces and fondle the mat house  
Until all that city is spinning.”

And this was the force of those words, that the clouds above the valley began to twirl, that ah-Puch's hunger opened in the sky and spun down onto the city of our fathers. Whirling were his teeth, sucking was the sound of his will, when his mouth kissed the plazas and markets. The roof thatch was torn away, the maize houses were emptied, the cacao vases and the market stalls and the roofcombs of the temples were smashed. Countless were the people seized and broken against stone walls. Only the spirits of the living lightning danced in the twisting winds, it was Brilliant Flash and Water Jumper who were lifted into the sky and leaped down again onto the people. They just laughed when the tornados ruffled their fires.

It is said that the Sky Priest of the white stone city wept as he said ah-Puch's final words. He alone saw Father Sun and Mother Moon turning forever from



Saktun-nal, he alone saw the ancestors of his people forsake them. But he did not stop, the god's words were burning in his blood, and he had to speak to save himself:

“Hear these words, oh, infants  
In the wombs of your mothers  
Feel your claws, feel your fangs  
The eyes of serpents are yours  
Claw your way out  
From blood into darkness  
Feast on the flesh of your parents.”

This is what those words did: they transformed the babies in the wombs of their mothers. It was ah-Puch's power from the early days of the creation that the Sky Priest called upon. The babies sliced the stomachs of their mothers with their claws, they ripped their mothers' insides with their fangs. Those poor women begged Father Sun and Mother Moon for help, but only ah-Puch heard them, and he just laughed. The transformed babies tore right out of their mothers, and all those women died. Their babies ran through the city on all fours, howling and snarling. They raked at the artisans and merchants and laborers. They gouged the children and the unmarried women. No one could stop them.

Now ah-Puch entered the white stone city and the green stone city, when the people were weak, when the people were dying. He came in person, the bony old man walked the stones of this world and broke them under his feet. He knocked over the guardian stones with his staff of broken ancestors, and the acantuns shattered. Behind him were his children, the nine Lords of the Night, laughing and playing their pipes. They were all there: Camazotz, the death bat, tearing open the veins of the people; Bone-snapper, cracking the ribs of the dead; Stalker, hunting those who had hidden themselves; Yellow Mist, whose strength had already been felt; Watery-eye, who sucked the flesh from the bodies of the dead; Pus Wound, who afflicted the survivors with disease; Skull Breaker, with his great stone club, bashing the heads of the corpses; Blood Sucker, draining out the essence of the dying; and Bloody Fang, tearing apart those who raised their spears. The night lords stomped on the dead and mashed their faces.

The king of the valley and the king of the mountains understood then that they had been tricked, that neither city was going to become greater than the other. “Now we are the kings of nothing,” were their words. “Our people are dead, our cities ruined. ah-Puch led us right down his road.” Chac Pak and Ox Tok raised up their spears against ah-Puch and his children, but what could they do to gods? Their hearts were pulled out, their blood devoured. Their faces were smashed and destroyed, their seed became nothing.

From the great plaza of the mountains and the new temples of the valley, ah-



Puch hurled forth darts of agony, darts of despair. They impaled the priests of Ch'ulwitznal and the priests of Saktun-nal, and all those people died. Their bodies shriveled and tumbled down the steps of ah-Puch's black pyramid-mountains, and the lords of the night stamped the corpses into dust. Then they knocked down the mat houses of the two cities, they knocked down the palaces of the priests and the palaces of the sorcerors. All the temples were cracked, the pyramid-mountains tumbled, nothing that was whole was left. It was ah-Puch alone who walked in the ruins of the cities and enjoyed his cigar.

When the dawn was near ah-Puch leaned on his staff and called out: "Oh, my brother! All these long years I have been unwelcome in the cities of your children. All these long years I have hidden in the jungle, like a dog. But, see what has happened. Your children came to me, and now they are the dogs, in hiding! If any still live, they will die by my servants, they will be made small." He flicked his cigar, its cinders flew into the valley and into the mountains, and the two cities burned. Only when Father Sun's face appeared did ah-Puch and his children go back into the darkness.

It was then that Father Sun wept, and Mother Moon, when they saw how far down ah-Puch's road our ancestors had walked. They called to the people who were hiding in the villages and the secret places. They called to those who still remembered their names.

"You must begin all over again," Father Sun said to those people. "You must leave these dead cities and build new places. You must chop out fresh fields. And you must make a story of these things that have happened, to remind you for all time of the price of my brother's power."

So our ancestors came to this place, this village on the river, and here they started again. Those were the days of death by snakebite, death by jaguar, ambush by fallen men, but our fathers honored the gods and the goddesses, and they were protected. They grew stronger, and some went to Xunich, and some went to Chacwitz, but right here in this place was where all the new sprouts started, after the war. Now we remember the mistakes of our fathers. We remember their strength, and their pride, and their fall. We remember the tricks of ah-Puch, and again we hunt his servants in the jungle, in the mountains. In this time of the new dawn we remember it all, and this time we will never forget.

