

## Entrada

“At first there seemed to exist nothing,  
but the inertia of time lost, a vast silence  
under a stilled seascape of shadows.

“Gradually the waters glowed with twilight, and the overcast of aqua-gray  
dissipated, unveiling moon-stroked waves.

“Then Morning Star rose over what would be known as El Golfo de Mexico,  
nurturing warm southeast winds that circumscribed the Yucateca peninsula and  
lifted moisture from the surface. When the winds reached the sea opening, they  
gushed northeast in quest of relief from differing pressures of air, water and  
temperature. Evaporating, forming into clouds, wandering until they fell as rain,  
ice or snow, to end drought or precipitate flooding—the driven waters followed  
paths inscribed in the planet’s skin, endlessly replaying their role in the world’s  
continuation.

“I tell you all this because I am one of the last Sentinels. The way my bones  
and joints ache today, I must be the oldest. No importa. What is important is that  
my meager words will hardly give you an appreciation for what once was, how it  
all began. Consider mis palabras, accept them or not, but afterwards you must each  
learn to nurture them into your own words of power. I cannot do this for you. After  
all, you young apprentices are merely the latest in a long line. But, boys and girls, I  
digress and should return to the tale you may not believe...

“Alone between ocean and sky an immense sea turtle stroked her leather-tough fins, following the sacred path. Like the waters, she searched for her own level. She will find her way.

“Where the winds touched the shell-strewn western shore, trees grew up to the beach, so dense they allowed only whispers to pass between. The deflected gusts rolled up the jungle wall to stream over treetops and deposit their cool, misty blanket. Losing energy, they searched for weak links between the crests of huge ahuehuate trees. Each dawn the breezes found ways to slip into the lower levels, at last penetrating as warmed breath to pamper orange tree leaves, orchids and reeds, and touch creatures living below.

“By late afternoon, the chicharras began their raspy serenade, their hind-leg scratching overshadowing other night noise. Everywhere, decomposing animal-vegetable-mineral heaps steeped the jungle with a promise of new life. The wet heat caressed each object, whether alive or soon to be alive again. Sounds, smells and other sensations—along with innumerable feather-bearing, fur-bonded, scale-clad life forms proclaiming their day’s work at an end—signaled dusk had returned to the lush green selva.

“Jóvenes, from the look on your young caras, I see you think you know what is coming. You do not. I hope to convey to you all that happened, as well as its meaning. Let us also hope you have the tolerance to put up with this old madman’s visions... Now, a little something to whistle my wetness. Of course, that is not how

it is usually said, but then, what has ever remained as it was? Enough again, with my digressions...

“We are now on the canopied jungle floor where an ancient trail crosses a clearing ringed with shadows. From one dark niche, tucked amid monstrous rustling palms, a pair of barely discernible intense eyes peer out over prominent nostrils. The vegetation conceals the creature’s bulk, deceiving one’s grasp of the lurking massiveness.

“This creature’s eyes do not do well in translating common scenery into comprehensible shapes. The eyes struggle for clarity. In a land of brilliant color those opaque eyes operate in an opposing spectrum. Instead of deep emerald plátano leaves, the eyes make out gray forms that twinkle as if the plant holds a charge of lightening. Instead of the bright scarlet parrot, the eyes highlight the bird’s throbbing bloodstream. And glaring sunlight leads to blindness. For good reason then, the creature’s irises do not fully open and its eyelids blink often for relief.

“A plump armadillo ambles out of the underbrush, its gray body stark against the greenery. Sensing her vulnerability to a stalker, she stops, and after seconds drops, into a stilled prenatal curl, breathless, camouflaging herself as unworthy of attack.

“The eyes scan the plated skin protecting vital organs and the delicious shell muscle. Abruptly the mammal hops into an upright stance to scurry into the undergrowth, surprised at having escaped harm.

“As the wiry tail disappears, the eyes spot a dragonfly and ignore smaller entities crawling over dirt, trunk and leaf. The eyes note the jaguar and javelina that frequent the path. But that which hides in the shadows lies still as a stone to all passersby, content to wait hours for its preferred prey.

“A large buck prances into the clearing, nibbles one cactus button too many before bolting through the bramble, straining for another day of life. But its pursuer’s skill, agility and wisdom predetermine its eventual, lethal capture.

“Its life force filtering away, the bait of deer is returned to the clearing, positioned for nearby villagers to discover. Then follows a tedious scrubbing of tracks and other signs. For reasons unimportant at the moment, it is difficult for this creature to concentrate on details, but failure to erase the tracings would compel the villagers to mark the clearing as tecuani, taboo. Their culture *primitive*, as some people would say, these people are not simpleminded. Perhaps that enhances their status as the creature’s favored prey.

“Though their village consists of but thirty huts built on piles that overlook the surrounding bounty, this culture wants for little. And their gods match their needs.

“The wind god who relieves the suffocating humidity; the flower-love goddess who provides for the most spiritual; the god of spring who shares in the end of the rainy season; and a god of the hunt, to secure nourishment. Limestone grottoes within a day’s walk provide virgin waters vital to maintaining communion to these spirits, as well as to slake the villagers’ thirst.

“The deer’s carcass attracts tiny carnivores using the path, their total effect on the corpse, insignificant. The trap’s guardian routs larger scavengers.

“Until a villager discovers the deer and runs to summon her brethren—the moment the creature born of Chicxulub has awaited.

“Thus, as it had for millennia, the carnage would begin.

“Here I must—Chicxulub, you ask? Ah, that is El Gran Cuento, a longer and most complicated telling. For another time. So, as I was saying, here we must pause, for I thirst again from this telling and someone has depleted our mezcal. There will hopefully be time later for me to complete this phase of your apprenticeships. But if not...”

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