

WITH
A STORY FROM
THE UNDERWORLD

Drama



GO INTO THE UNDERWORLD

A STORY
FROM MAYA
MYTHOLOGY

The thrilling story of two twin brothers and their epic quest to
defeat the lords of the underworld

BY SPENCER KAYDEN • ART BY JUAN CARLOS RIBAS



CHARACTERS

Choose the character you will play. *Characters with a large speaking part.

*Stage Directors 1, 2, 3
(SD1, SD2, SD3)
*Elders 1 and 2
*Hunter, a demigod

*Jaguar Moon, Hunter's twin brother
*Mosquito
*Flying Scab, *Chief/Lord,
*Skull Scepter, lords of the underworld

Owl
All Lords, to be read by a group
Grandmother
Xulu [shool], a seer

As You Read

Think about how the twins deal with the obstacles they face.



PROLOGUE



SD1: Two Maya elders stand in a cornfield in present-day Guatemala.

Elder 1: All civilizations have myths and stories they tell to explain the world.

Elder 2: Join us as we tell you a story from our mythology. It's a story of how time came to be, and it comes from the Popol Vuh [POH-pul VOO], also known as the Book of the People.

Elder 1: What people, you may ask?

Elder 2: The Maya people, in Mesoamerica, an area that includes much of what is now Mexico and Central America.

Elder 1: Our civilization stretches back thousands of years.

Elder 2: So let us journey back to a time before humans walked the earth. It was a time of magic, of powerful beings that could talk to all the creatures of the world.

Elder 1: It was a time before the moon and before the sun.

Elder 2: A time before time itself.

SD2: The cornfield goes dark.



SCENE 1



SD3: In the same cornfield, two twin brothers are lounging among the cornstalks.

SD1: They are Hunter and Jaguar Moon.

SD2: Around them, enchanted tools work the soil.

Hunter: Look at my magic. My shovel works so hard.

Jaguar Moon: And my rake is quite talented.

Hunter and Jaguar Moon (with delight): Ha ha ha!

SD3: A mosquito lands on Hunter's arm.

SD1: Hunter catches it and is about to crush it between his fingers when—

Mosquito: Don't kill me! Have mercy!

Hunter: Mercy? You were about to suck my blood.

Mosquito: Don't blame me for my nature. If you spare my life, I will tell you a secret.

Jaguar Moon: What secret?

Mosquito: You were never meant to be farmers.

Hunter: What do you mean?

Mosquito: Your father and uncle were great ballplayers. Their equipment is still in your hut. It belongs to you now.

SD2: The boys' eyes grow wide.

Mosquito: Your grandmother hid the equipment from you.

Jaguar Moon: Why?

Mosquito: To protect you. She fears that if you play ball, you will meet the same fate as your father and uncle.

Jaguar Moon: What happened to them?

Mosquito: Their ball playing was so noisy, it disturbed the lords of Xibalba [shee-BAHL-bah].

Hunter: The underworld?

Mosquito: Indeed. The lords of the underworld were angry, so they **summoned** your father and uncle to play a match. Your father and uncle . . . never returned.

SD3: The twins look at each other.

Mosquito: The lords of the underworld destroyed them.

Hunter (boastfully): That won't happen to us.

Jaguar Moon: Let's play ball!



SCENE 2



SD1: On a large platform above the stage, the twins stand on an ancient Maya ball court.

SD2: Stone rings extend from sloping walls on opposite sides of the court.

SD3: The twins wear arm braces and hip guards.

SD1: Below them, the stage is dark.

Mosquito: To win, you must be the first to get the ball

through the ring. But you can't use your hands or feet.

Jaguar Moon: Let's go.

SD2: Hunter whacks the ball with his upper arm. Jaguar Moon returns it with his hip.

SD3: They race up and down the court, again and again.

SD1: Lights come on below the court, revealing the 14 lords of the underworld. Each lord sits on a throne of bones.

Flying Scab: What is that awful noise?

Chief Lord: Someone is playing ball again!

Skull Scepter: How dare they stomp on our roof! Have they no respect for the peace of our realm?

Flying Scab: Where is our owl?

SD2: A giant horned owl swoops in.

Chief Lord (to the owl): Go summon them.

Owl (to the lords): How should I convince them? Did you not destroy their father and uncle?

Flying Scab: Flatter them. Say they are excellent ballplayers and we want to meet them.

Skull Scepter: Tell them we challenge them to a game here in the underworld, that it will be great fun and they will be rewarded if they can beat us.

Chief Lord: The reward, of course, being death.

SD3: The lords laugh as the owl flies off.

All Lords: Ha ha ha ha ha!

SCENE 3

SD1: In their hut, the twins pack their gear. Grandmother paces nervously.

Grandmother: Don't you see that you have angered the lords of the underworld?

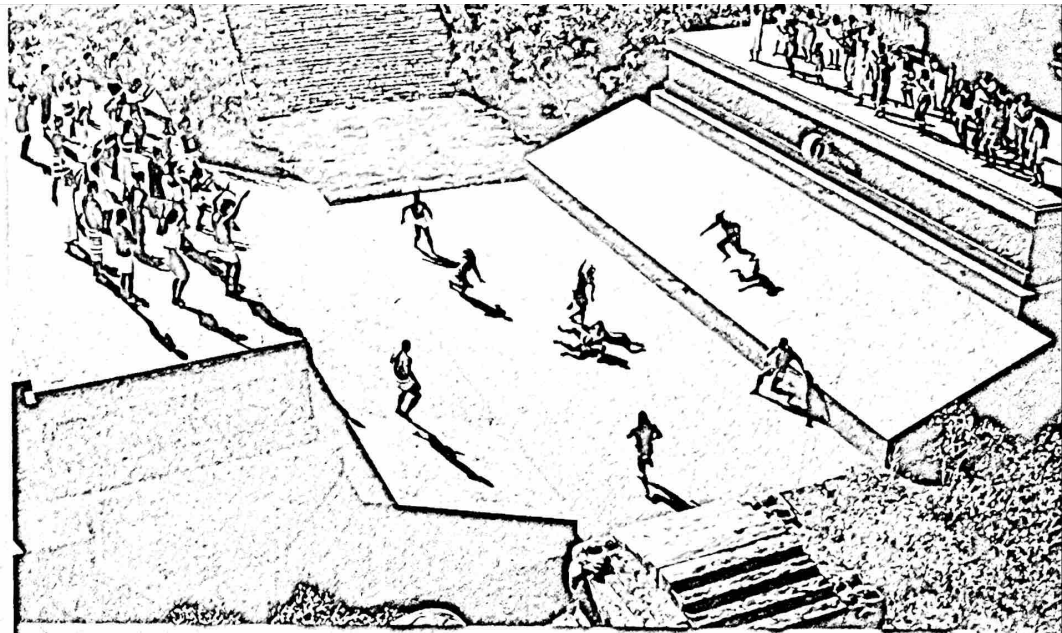
Hunter: They are not angry. They want to play us.

Grandmother: Foolish boy, why do you believe the owl? The lords' only business is death.

Jaguar Moon: Do not worry, Grandmother. We will outwit them.

Grandmother: I cannot bear to lose you as I lost my sons.

SD2: Hunter begins digging holes in the ground.



THE GAME The ball game pok-ta-pok was played across Mesoamerica starting around 1650 B.C., making it one of the oldest known team ball games in the world. The game is often viewed as a metaphor for both the battle between good and evil and the cycle of life and death.

Hunter: We will plant cornstalks here in the hut.

Jaguar Moon: As long as the corn flourishes, you will know we are safe. If the stalks wither, then we have surely died.

SCENE 4

SD3: The twins enter a cave and descend steep stone stairs to the underworld.

SD1: They make their way along a dark path until they come to a throne room.

Chief Lord: Welcome to Xibalba.

SD2: The twins bow.

Hunter: We have come to play ball.

Chief Lord: Of course. But first we must determine if you are worthy of playing against us.

SD3: They lead the twins to a dark hut.

Flying Scab: Behold the House of Darkness. Prove that you are worthy by spending the night here.

Skull Scepter: Take this candle. Here is the test: Keep the candle burning all night.

Flying Scab: In the morning, return the candle unburnt.

Chief Lord: If you fail this test, you will join us in death.

SD1: The twins go inside the dark hut.

Hunter (quietly): Fireflies, I beckon you!

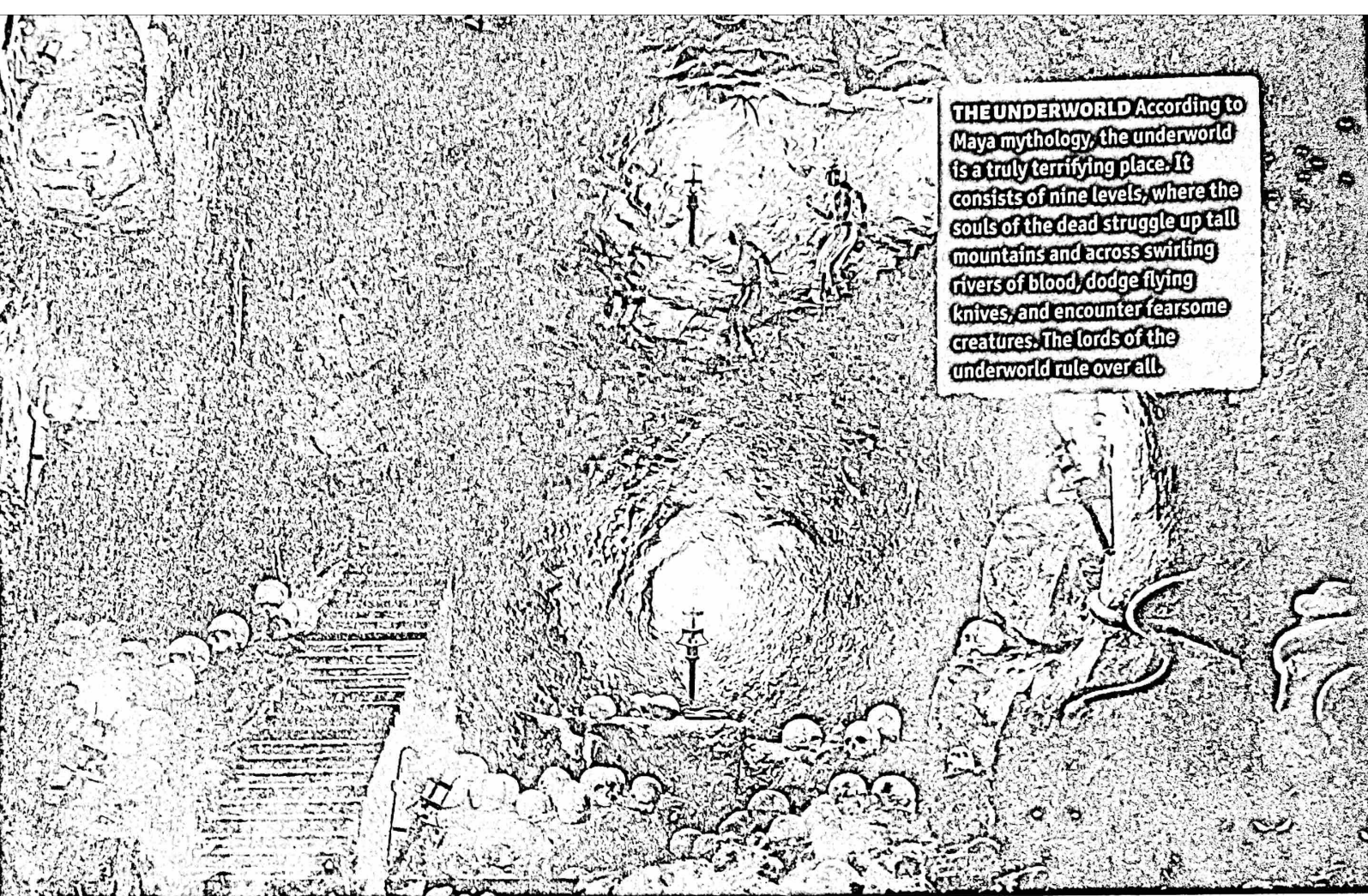
SD2: Dozens of fireflies swarm around them, then land on the tip of the candle.

Jaguar Moon (whispering): How flame-like you look.

SD3: Outside the House of Darkness, the lords smile.

Chief Lord: The candle is burning. They shall fail.





THE UNDERWORLD According to Maya mythology, the underworld is a truly terrifying place. It consists of nine levels, where the souls of the dead struggle up tall mountains and across swirling rivers of blood, dodge flying knives, and encounter fearsome creatures. The lords of the underworld rule over all.

SCENE 5

SD1: In the morning, the twins walk out of the House of Darkness.

Hunter: Here is your candle, intact and unburnt.

Skull Scepter: What? How?

Chief Lord (to himself): These twins may be more clever than we thought.

SD2: The lords lead the twins to another hut.

Chief Lord: This is the House of Knives.

Flying Scab: Survive until tomorrow, if you can.

Skull Scepter: Not only that, but you must greet us in the morning with fresh flowers.

Jaguar Moon: Very well.

SD3: The twins enter the hut where sharp knives of every size fly through the air, trying to slice them.

Hunter: Stop knives! We are not the flesh you want.

SD1: The knives go still, all their points facing the ground.

Jaguar Moon: Ants! Come to us!

SD2: An army of ants appears.

Hunter: Go into the lords' garden and bring us flowers.

SD3: The lords sit smugly outside the House of Knives.

Chief Lord: They will soon be chopped to bits.

SD1: The lords do not notice the long line of ants trailing out of the hut.

SCENE 6

SD2: The next morning, the lords open the hut to find the brothers alive and well.

Jaguar Moon: Here are your flowers.

Flying Scab: How is this possible?

Hunter: Can we play ball with you now?

Chief Lord: There's one final task: the House of Jaguars.

SD3: The boys are thrown into a hut of hungry jaguars.

Hunter: Do not eat us. We will get you something tastier.

SD1: The twins use their magic to make a pile of fresh bones appear. The jaguars pounce and begin to feast.

SD2: Outside the hut, the lords listen.

Skull Scepter: Do you hear that chomping and slurping?

Flying Scab: I hear the crunch of their bones.

SD3: The twins emerge from the hut unharmed.

Skull Scepter: What?! I do not understand.

Chief Lord: Who *are* you two?

SD1: Jaguar Moon and Hunter smile innocently.

Jaguar Moon: So then . . . shall we play ball?

 **SCENE 7** 

SD2: The twins stand at one end of a ball court, dressed in their gear. The lords stand at the other.

Flying Scab: We will use our ball.

Hunter: We would rather use ours.

Flying Scab: No, we insist.

SD3: Chief Lord hurls the ball toward the boys. A dagger emerges from the ball and slashes its way through the air.

SD1: The boys duck and let the ball smash into the wall.

Hunter: I am starting to think these lords want to kill us.

Jaguar Moon: Whatever gives you that idea?

SD2: Hunter tosses his ball and whacks it down the court.

SD3: The game goes on for hours, the ball flying back and forth, back and forth.

SD1: But then—

SD2: Thud!

SD3: Chief Lord sends the ball through the ring.

Flying Scab: Ha! We beat you! But you played valiantly.

Skull Scepter: To honor your talents, join us for a feast.

 **SCENE 8** 

SD1: The twins talk quietly.

Hunter: They are sure to kill us no matter what.

Jaguar Moon: Death does seem inevitable. But that will not stop us.

SD2: They summon Xulu, the seer.

Hunter: Soon we will die.

Jaguar Moon: You must tell the lords of the underworld to grind up our bones into fine dust, like the softest flour made from corn.

Hunter: Tell them to scatter the dust over the river.

Xulu: I will do as you ask.

SD3: Xulu leaves.

Jaguar Moon: Will this work?

Hunter: I believe that the dust of our bones will come together and we will rise again.

SD1: The boys approach the feast.

Flying Scab: Here they are, the guests of honor!

Hunter: We are no fools.

Jaguar Moon: We know your plans for us.

SD2: The boys grab hands and jump into a giant bonfire.



SD3: The lords are shocked, then break into cheers.

All Lords: Hooray! Hooray!

Chief Lord: They are gone at last!

Skull Scepter (shouting): Xulu, you are needed!

SD1: Xulu appears.

Flying Scab: The wretched brothers are finally dead.

Xulu: You must grind their bones into fine dust, like the softest flour made from corn. Scatter the dust in the river.

Skull Scepter: We will do as you say.

 **SCENE 9** 

SD2: Up on earth, Grandmother sits in the hut, weeping by the cornstalks. All of them have withered.

Grandmother: No! No, it cannot be. They cannot be dead.

SD3: But then, slowly, the cornstalks start to rustle.

SD1: The cracked brown leaves begin to turn green.

Grandmother: What's this? My grandsons live again?

 **SCENE 10** 

SD2: The lights come up on the river in the underworld.

SD3: Two figures emerge from the water. It's the twins.

SD1: They wear ragged clothes, hiding their identities.

Jaguar Moon: Our plan worked.

Hunter: Now we will defeat them.

SD2: The twins, in disguise, wander through the underworld.

SD3: They perform wonderful dances and amazing feats of magic.

SD1: Crowds gather and cheer wherever they go.

SD2: The lords' owl swoops in.

Owl: The lords of the underworld have heard of your extraordinary magic and wish to meet you.

Hunter (quietly): Just as expected.

Owl: What did you say?

Hunter: Nothing. Let us go meet them.

 **SCENE 11** 

SD3: The twins stand again in the throne room. The lords do not recognize them.

Chief Lord: We have summoned you to entertain us.

Skull Scepter: Show us your mighty magic.





THE CORN Corn was an incredibly important crop for the ancient Maya. It grew easily in the climate, could be prepared in many ways (including being ground into a kind of flour), and had many uses (for example, the husks could be woven into baskets). Corn also played a significant role in Maya culture and religion. According to the Popol Vuh, the first humans were created from corn. Corn remains a crucial crop with cultural and spiritual significance for Maya people today.

THE POPOLVUH was passed down orally for centuries before it was written down. A written version from the early 1700s is now housed in a library in Chicago.

SD1: The twins walk to a house.
SD2: Suddenly, flames shoot up. The house crackles and burns.
Flying Scab: Hey, that's my house!
Jaguar Moon: Just wait.
SD3: The house returns to its normal state.
Flying Scab: Wonderful! How did you do that?
Skull Scepter: Do my house next!
SD1: They burn another house and bring it back.
Skull Scepter: Impressive. But can you destroy a living thing and bring it back?
Hunter: Certainly.
SD2: Hunter reaches into his brother's chest and pulls out his beating heart. Jaguar Moon falls to the ground dead.
SD3: Hunter returns the heart to Jaguar Moon's chest. His brother revives and stands back up.
Chief Lord: He's alive!
Skull Scepter: This magic is incredible.
Flying Scab: Try it on me! Try it on me!
Skull Scepter: No, I want to do it!

Chief Lord: Me first!
Flying Scab: No me!
Jaguar Moon: There's time enough for all of you.
SD1: The lights go down.

EPILOGUE

SD2: The elders face the audience.
Elder 1: As you may have guessed, the twins destroyed the lords of the underworld . . . and did not bring them back to life.
Elder 2: The twins returned to earth and ascended into the sky.
SD3: Elder 1 points at the rising sun.
Elder 1: Hunter became the sun.
SD1: Elder 2 points at the disappearing moon.
Elder 2: Jaguar Moon became the moon.
Elder 1: That is how the first day dawned.
Elder 2: And beneath the gaze of these Hero Twins, time, as we know it, began. ●

Special thanks to Dr. Edgar Garcia of the University of Chicago for his assistance with this play

Writing Contest

To outwit someone is to beat them through cleverness. How do the twins outwit the lords of the underworld? Answer in an essay, using text evidence from the play. Entries must be submitted to **Twins Contest** by a teacher, parent, or legal guardian.* Three winners will each get *The Storm Runner* by J.C. Cervantes.

*Entries must be written by a student in grades 4-12 and submitted by their teacher, parent, or legal guardian, who will be the entrant and must be a legal resident of the U.S. age 18 or older. See page 2 for details.

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MY LIFE IN A MAYA VILLAGE

Interview

Meet Ezekiel Canti, whose people have told stories from the Popol Vuh for more than a thousand years.

INTERVIEW BY LAUREN SALISBURY

What is life like in your village?

Maya people have been in the area for at least 1,200 years, and about 500 people live here today. People farm to feed their families and grow extra to sell, which helps pay for things like school and books. At my family's farm, we grow corn and beans. We also grow pumpkins for their pepitas, or seeds. Women sometimes sell crafts, like traditional Maya baskets and jewelry.

What are the different Maya communities in Belize like?

Numerous Maya communities can be found in Belize. Yucatec Maya live in the north and west, and Mopan Maya and Q'eqchi' [kek-CHEE] Maya live in the south. Each has its own culture and traditions, but they are more alike than different. All Maya are recognized for their agriculture, healing treatments, and ancient crafts, like pottery and weaving. The main differences are in dress, language, and music. For example, the music of the Mopan is **marimba**, and the music of the Q'eqchi' is harp.

What does the Popol Vuh mean to you?

Growing up, my father would tell me the story that his grandfather told him about how the sun and moon came to be.

There are elements of the Popol Vuh that are a part of everyday life, like the ball game—we call it pok-ta-pok—and jaguars and corn. The Maya have been growing corn forever and have perfected the agricultural methods for growing it. Since I can remember, corn has been a very important aspect of my life. We eat it every day, and it supports us financially because we sell it at the market in Punta Gorda, the closest town to us. It also feeds our livestock.

What would you say to someone who is curious about life in your village?

At my university, I've made friends from

many backgrounds.

I invited them to come to the south of Belize to go to the Maya Day celebration. When I danced there in the deer dance—a traditional Maya dance—they were in awe. They wanted to dance with us and try on the costumes. Maya people are very friendly. We will always accept you, give you a taste of our traditional dishes, and teach you how to do anything, like how to speak Maya. ("Botick" is "thank you." "Dios" is "hello.") So I would tell people to join us and learn more. ●



Name: Ezekiel Canti
Age: 20
From: The Mopan
Maya village of
Santa Cruz, Belize



Ezekiel is studying to be a conservation biologist at the University of Belize.



Playing the role of a jaguar in a ceremonial dance as a young boy

Shutterstock.com (background); Courtesy of Ezekiel Canti (all other images)