

QUIPU

Written by

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Wrote a film screenplay (and comic screenplay) following an orphaned free diver living in a technocracy. First part of an **Indigenous Sci-Fi** immersive action story based in pre-colonial, pre-Incan Peru. See more on my website:
<https://connortwall.github.io/home.html>

Vocabulary: Spondylus: "muyu", a spiked deep seashell prized for its appearance, rarity, and difficulty to manipulate artistically.

INTRODUCTION TEXT (FADE IN PARAGRAPH AT A TIME)

Hundreds of years ago on the west coast of what is now known as South America...

Rapidly growing Indigenous communities experimented with agriculture, architecture, and astronomy to advance scientific limits.

Quipus, complex woven tools made of multicolored fibers, beads, and knots were among the few physical systems used to **document identity, record cultural knowledge, perform complex computations, and more.**

Upon introduction of disease and governmental interference by Spanish colonizers, major warehouses of Quipus were burned to protect long-held secrets.

The full extent of their use is still unknown.

EXT. Open Ocean Daytime

Sunlight peaks through soft white clouds in a clear blue sky.

Slow pan down from the sky to the open ocean. Bright yellow sunlight glitters on a gently turbulent ocean surface. The edge of a medium-sized, narrow reed boat comes into view. A slightly rocky camera suggests lightheartedness.

Big close-up of a young boy, 8-years-old, looking down, busy with his hands.

Close-up of the boy's hands. He's examining shells and rocks on his lap while sitting in the rocking boat. He scrapes off seaweed from a Spondylus shell with his nail and throws it far into the water.

SFX

(plop)

The boy reaches for another shell and pricks a finger. He quickly sucks his finger and looks for any sign of blood.

Suddenly, a man, 30s, pop out to the surface of the water with an arm full of rocks and shells.

Like a dolphin, somehow, he gracefully and powerfully propels himself further upwards and releases them all into the narrow boat cavity without dropping one or tipping the boat.

Again, suddenly two shells -one grasped in each hand break through the water surface- followed by arms as a girl, mid-teens, comes up with a gasp. Treading water beside her father she stretches for the boat drops the first shell into the boat. As she reaches her other

hand for the boat, the second shell slips with a plop, sinking out of sight.

The boy looks at the shell she just put in the boat before launching back into the ocean.

SISTER

Hey!

THE DIVER (YOUNG)

That one was alive! You can't take that!

The sister splashes water at the boy in annoyance. The boy splashes back, hitting both divers who treading water and squinting in the sunlight.

FATHER

Hey! Children!

The father splashes water back at them both then tips the boat and the boy falls in as they splash the cold, salty water in each other's faces. As the boat capsizes, they shout and laugh in the water.

CUT TO:

EXT. ANDEAN PLATEAU MIDDAY

Echoing laughs and close-up of a young man's hands - a little scar is in the place where the boy pricked his finger.

Long shot - from behind, THE DIVER a young man, 17, wearing a small rucksack and black and blue clothing -practical for a day's journey- walks toward a town in the distance. THE DIVER is looking at his hands and walking towards a village. The ground is dirt, dry, and flat with light shrubbery. Grey mountains enclose the horizon.

The wind is slightly dry and it whirrs like on the beach.

A single llama runs past, from the village.

Close up of THE DIVER looking into the distance.

Medium shot of THE DIVER rushing home into the distance.

EXT. HOUSE AFTERNOON

Close up of THE DIVER. Runs to a beige wood and white stone house. THE DIVER's expression freezes, eyes and ears still on edge. THE DIVER runs out of frame.

Medium shot behind the house. THE DIVER runs over to the disarray on the ground.

A dark hole in the ground is visible, where his mother's grave was. A pile of rubble lays in stark contrast to the otherwise flat ground. Bones, mummified remains, and damp soil litter the scorched surface-level dirt; teeth and corn are scattered all over.

A pool of dark thick liquid on the ground slowly seeps into the dry soil, swallowing tiny blades of grass.

Perspective shot moves toward the source of the blood.

He sees blackened, wet, red-soaked clothing -on the ground and on a body.

Two crimson cavities in the chest of his father reveal the source of the pooling blood. Pieces of his ribcage folded outwards outline where his lungs should have been.

THE DIVER's sister is found in a similarly awkward splayed-out position in his mother's dug-out grave.

Medium shot of THE DIVER, he looks up and around defensively and longingly and notices something else on the ground. A piece of black and red checkered cloth lays in the rubble, a cloth he doesn't recognize.

THE DIVER slides down into the shallow hole to check his sister's body. He sits down against the wall, arms on knees, defeated. The mummified remains are brittle and fragmented yet are only a year old - recent enough to still make out a clear facial structure and shriveled decaying lips peeling away, showing a frigid, decayed grimace.

Medium shot of THE DIVER looking at his sister and the remains of the burial site.

He notices the crumbling walls and how the collection of shells she was buried seems to be missing Spondylus.

THE DIVER

Mother. Father, sister. I'm sorry.

THE DIVER grabs the strange cloth and looks at it and back at his former family members. He takes hold of nearby ocean rocks, warmly.

THE DIVER hears a noise and climbs out of the hole. He looks around.

THE DIVER notices footprints and begins to follow them around and into the house.

THE DIVER (CONT'D)

Hello!?

INT. DIVER'S HOUSE

PRIEST 1 is dressed in the same strange red checkered pattern in his mother's desecrated grave. The robes are heavy and over PRIEST 1 shoulder to toe.

In a blur of movement, distinct hands gestures are visible. PRIEST 1 is sliding knots and flipping spindles of colors between the color of the sky and moon he's never seen before. It's impossible to tell if the figure's hands are moving impossibly fast or abnormally slow (Matrix Agent Smith; Necromonger Chronicles of Riddick <https://youtu.be/lqeS6c4ezpU?t=71>). THE PRIEST reaches through the wall and their hand disappears, through a liquid veil.

THE DIVER begins to run at PRIEST 1.

THE DIVER

(angrily)

What did you do to my family?

Water droplets condense in the air just as pottery and furniture leave contact with the floor.

SFX

Clatter, srke, whwep...

Perspective shot in slow motion.

In a slow and deep breath, THE DIVER looks at the doorway, slightly faster than the objects floating around him.

Medium shot - with a subtle expression of surprise PRIEST 1 steps through the portal as THE DIVER lunges for PRIEST 1.

In an instant, the wall shimmers. What was once a wall becomes more like a stained glass window.

Flash of colors and a kaleidoscope of white light.

SMASH CUT TO:

THE DIVER is on a lush grassy cliff with the setting sun shining directly in his face.

THE DIVER appears sick to his stomach and disoriented. PRIEST 1 is moving their hands impossibly again creating another portal several yards ahead on the cliff edge.

THE DIVER recovers and tries again to run for PRIEST 1. This time THE DIVER is slow and lunges for empty air atop the cliff.

Wide shot of cliff - diver falls formlessly at the ocean for several moments before immediately snapping into a straight line just before hitting the water's surface.

SFX (CONT'D) SSPLASSSHHH!

THE DIVER looks up at the cliff through the choppy water as he sinks.

EXT. UNDERWATER

As THE DIVER sinks, his heated anger transforms into defeat. THE DIVER is sinking, falling underwater, a slight glow from below.

Medium shot facing THE DIVER downward - underwater, surrounded by a blue-black void.

THE DIVER falls into the darkness of the lake water looking up. Surrounded in a blanket of darkness.

THE DIVER

There's a tranquility in water. It
holds you. And squeezes you tight
until every earthly problem fades
away.

FADE TO BLACK.

But water is raging.

(MORE) THE DIVER (CONT'D)

It's the cradle of life and will never
smother an urge to take one, last, breath.
Exploding beyond asphyxiation.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. WATER SURFACE AND SHORELINE

Medium shot of the surface - THE DIVER resurfaces.

Close up - THE DIVER gasps for air then looks upwards to where the figure once stood looking down.

Medium shot - top-down view of THE DIVER in the water. THE DIVER swims out to the shore, a beach perpendicular to the cliff.

Perspective shot - THE DIVER looks to the shore and sees a stone monolith and begins to swim over.

Long shot top-down of THE DIVER swimming to shoreline

Medium shot facing the water - THE DIVER, on the shore dazed, breathing in heavily and deeply, yet calmly; as if filling lungs with a new smell for the first time.

Perspective long shot - distant landscape is visible.

Close up - THE DIVER recognizes familiar surroundings.

THE DIVER

Not too far from home.

Optional: Read more; See ending priest dialogue

EXT. DIVER'S HOUSE EVENING

The house is now littered with standard Moche pottery – mugs and vases with depictions of immortality, sexual pleasure, transformation, and more. (Allusions to her connection with self, transformation, and camay).

Shot through the house window into the backyard. There are now three graves. Three mounds of packed dirt marked by three newly placed tombstones.

A beat.

THE ARTIST (O.S.)

I came as soon as I heard.

Pan from tombs through the window to THE DIVER, sitting.

THE DIVER looks out at the graves.

THE DIVER

What happened to my father and sister? Where were you when it happened?

Medium shot – THE ARTIST, a woman in her 30s sits inside the house, wearing dark indigo with gold highlights and a maze of parallel yellow lines, in a delicate fabric cloak. She wears a necklace with a circle, a Lapis stone moon.

THE DIVER walks over heavily to where THE ARTIST is sitting.

THE ARTIST

I was gathering indigo.

THE DIVER

(annoyedly)

You and your paints. They were dying...and you were.. out...
looking for more colors?

A beat.

Stop living in your fantasy world! If you lived in reality maybe they would still be alive.

THE DIVER turns to look at THE ARTIST who is standing by.

THE ARTIST

(heated)

What would you have me do?

THE DIVER

(meanly)

That's right, you're just a painter.

A beat.

THE DIVER (CONT'D) I don't
have anything to remember them by.

Flashback to mother's decayed grimace.

THE ARTIST

But you do!

THE DIVER

You wouldn't understand.

THE ARTIST You're right! I
never had the family diving gift like
the rest of you! But I do know memories
live in our hearts! And that makes them
live eternally.

Medium shot of THE ARTIST. THE ARTIST sitting, turns away to look
for a brush behind her in a ceramic pot – a breastfeeding baby with
an open mouth full of brushes.

THE ARTIST (CONT'D)

It is past time you've learned about
camay (cah-my). Let us create something
to remember our family by. Something with
real meaning, not just stones or shells.

THE DIVER

Fine.

THE ARTIST

Neither your father nor your sister
understood this. They reveled in the fame
of diving and collecting shells for the
wealthy while I was forced to find other
paths in life.

THE ARTIST takes a fine brush and dips it into a cup with indigo
paint.

THE DIVER

Painting changes nothing.

THE ARTIST

You misunderstand Camay. Painting and
molding changes the world and our
experience of it. When I sculpt Si, the
moon goddess, and paint her face, her
vitality grows within the object.

THE ARTIST turns around, straddling a 2-foot vase, and resumes painting it indigo.

THE ARTIST (CONT'D)

The paint, clay, and creation process – together they make her real, radiating energy and life.

THE ARTIST (CONT'D)

Perhaps Si guided me away to shield me from this violence.

THE DIVER walks over and sits beside THE ARTIST at the oversized half-painted vase.

THE DIVER

Why would Si leave father and sister to die? And in that way?

THE ARTIST

Camay only exists where we make it. Muyu alone offers no protection from harm. I have heard talk of droughts in Tiwanaku and elites searching for Muyu. No more than usual. Perhaps the priests of Tiwanaku they're not as benevolent and isolated as they claim to be.

THE ARTIST resumes painting.

Close-up shot of THE ARTIST.

THE ARTIST (CONT'D)

Give me your arms. I'm going to paint on you. You will feel the difference.

THE ARTIST puts picks up a new brush and takes THE DIVER's hand and paints a line the thickness of two fingers from his index finger along the curve of his arm to his elbow.

THE DIVER

I have an empty soul and cracks in my heart. And tiny infinite voids that fill those cracks.

THE DIVER watches as THE ARTIST touches up the line on his arm.

THE DIVER (CONT'D)

What happens to the soul after hitting the ground. After it's already crumbled at the impact from the leap. After losing interest to fly.

THE DIVER takes a look at the paint and is not impressed.

THE ARTIST

If you slow your breathing you will feel better.

THE ARTIST begins painting another indigo line on his opposite arm, symmetrical to the original.

THE ARTIST (CONT'D)

Camay is the vital energy in all things. You
are now a vessel of Camay.

THE DIVER looks to his arm and inspects how the blue details change color as the paint dries on his forearm. He slows his breathing and a sense of security and peace washes over him.

A beat.

Fragile and sharp fragments and pottery tools float delicately with tense weightlessness. The air seems to flicker as the first encounter with PRIEST 1. A liquid static permeates the air, rippling outwards from the wall. And the air phases in place like hanging water droplets in a mist.

First, a hand appears. The hand is soon followed by shimmering black and red robes. Soon two priests are visible inside THE DIVER's house.

Extreme close up - THE DIVER gets ready to make a move, expecting a figure to step through this time.

Close up shot - THE DIVER runs for PRIEST 1. However, just as THE DIVER takes a breath, the low electric hum grows louder and ripples the air itself. The hum never reaches anything more than a sputter, like a repeating, irritating computer error bonk.

THE DIVER

What do you want?

Perspective long shot - PRIEST 1 gets in a ready stance.

PRIEST 2

Settle down.

Medium shot - PRIEST 2 looks at the dark tattoos along THE DIVER's arms, side-eyes PRIEST 1 almost pretending to hide annoyance. PRIEST 2 now has arms outstretched and welcoming.

PRIEST 2 (CONT'D)

On behalf of the priests of TIWANAKU, I
apologize. They have some unfortunately
violent habits. I assure you we come in peace.

Medium shot - PRIEST 2 approaches THE DIVER slowly.

Medium shot - PRIEST 2 looking reassuringly at PRIEST 1 and THE DIVER and new tattoos.

PRIEST 2 (CONT'D)

I see you have a healthy source
of in Camay. A curious source
of energy indeed.

THE ARTIST

It appears your call has been answered.

PRIEST 2

Fear not, camay is sacred. Follow and we
will resolve this misunderstanding.

THE DIVER looks back at THE ARTIST for help.

THE ARTIST

You are now a vessel. Who am I to interfere
with your Camay? This is your decision.

Close-up shot of THE DIVER, he looks around and follows
reluctantly.

Medium shot - All three walk up to the doorway which is now a
watery veil of yellow light.

Close up - Hesitant, THE DIVER puts up a hand to the light, testing
it before stepping through with the others.

EXT. TIWANAKU

Lush, green-covered mountains peek through the abnormally dense
mist. Miles of agricultural terraces and aqueducts in the middle
ground and loma* are dwarfed by this grand green mountain range.
(*areas of fog-watered vegetation in the coastal desert).

Medium shot - A sturdy stone building is visible. It stands out
from its surroundings.

THE DIVER

Where are we?

PRIEST 2

This is Tiwanaku. This is our marvel,
centuries in the making. You will meet
who you must.

Medium shot - All three walk up to the stone building doorway.
PRIEST 1 pulls out a petite, dull, flimsy, crocheted cloth and
shakes it, an old quipu.

PRIEST 1

We have the water messenger.

(Shamans or priests oversaw rituals and ceremonies to ask for rain.
The Spondylus/"muyu" was known as 'the water messenger' in this
context).

Medium shot - The door opens and all three enter the stone building, PRIEST 1 & 2 walking on either side of THE DIVER. (Both moon and shells relate to fertility in Moche beliefs)

PRIEST 2

When the ocean birthed you to our beach...

PRIEST 1

...our magic was born again.
It is strongest. At its peak.

PRIEST 2

Come wind, come rain, and rain again.

PRIEST 1

You'll be with us until times end.

Close up - TIWANAKU PRIEST 1 + 2

PRIEST 1 (CONT'D)

All day sun shines and blinds
with light.

PRIEST 2

He fades to black and sleeps at night.

PRIEST 1

But moon she shines forever bright.

PRIEST 2

She sees songbirds and jaguar fights.

PRIEST 1

Sun's strength eclipsed many fortnights.

PRIEST 2

By Moon's sweet grace and placid might.

Top-down shot - Inside the stone temple. Despite the ambient glow of mist outside, sharp angles of light and shadow cut across the smooth stone floor and across a circle of silhouettes of who seem to be other priests.

All are dressed in variations of heavy black, white, and red robes with similar checkered patterns (Greybeards Skyrim robes).

PRIEST 2 (O.S.) (CONT'D)

So you are a diver?