

Hunahpu and Xbalanque in the House of Bats

Extracted from *Popol Wuj* Part 4

(English translated version by Dennis Tedlock)

NOW they [Hunahpu and Xbalanque] were put inside bat house, with bats alone inside the house, a house of snatch-bats, monstrous beasts, their snouts like knives, the instruments of death. To come before these is to be finished off at once.

When they were inside they just slept in their blowgun; they were not bitten by the members of the household. But this is where they gave one of themselves up because of a snatch-bat that came down, he came along just as one of them showed himself.

They did it because it was actually what they were asking for, what they had in mind. And all night the bats are making noise: “Eek-eek! Eek-eek!” they say, and they say it all night.

Then it let up a little. The bats were no longer moving around. So there, one of the boys crawled to the end of the blowgun, since Xbalanque said:

“Hunahpu? Can you see how long it is till dawn?”

“Well, perhaps I should look to see how long it is,” he replied. So he kept trying to look out the muzzle of the blowgun, he tried to see the dawn.

And then his head was taken off by a snatch-bat, leaving Hunahpu’s body still stuffed inside.

“What’s going on? Hasn’t it dawned?” said Xbalanque. No longer is there any movement from Hunahpu. “What’s this?

Hunahpu hasn’t left, has he? What have you done?” He no longer moves; now there is only heavy breathing.

After that, Xbalanque despaired:

“Alas! We’ve given it all up!” he said. And elsewhere, the head meanwhile went rolling onto the court, in accordance with the word of One and Seven Death, and all the Xibalbans were happy over the head of Hunahpu.

After that, Xbalanque summoned all the animals: coati, peccary, all the animals, small and great. It was at night, still nighttime when he asked them for their food:

“Whatever your foods are, each one of you: that’s what I summoned you for, to bring your food here,” Xbalanque told them.

“Very well,” they replied, then they went to get what’s theirs, then indeed they all came back.

There's the one who only brought his rotten wood.

There's the one who only brought leaves.

There's the one who only brought stones.

There's the one who only brought earth, on through the varied foods of the animals, small and great, until the very last one remained: the coati. He brought a squash, bumping it along with his snout as he came.

And this became a simulated head for Hunahpu. His eyes were carved right away, then brains came from the thinker, from the sky. This was the Heart of Sky, Hurricane, who came down, came on down into Bat House. The face wasn't finished any too quickly; it came out well. His strength was just the same, he looked handsome, he spoke just the same.

And this is when it was trying to dawn, reddening along the horizon:

"Now make the streaks, man," the possum was told.

"Yes," said the old man. When he made the streaks he made it dark again; the old man made four streaks.

"Possum is making streaks," people say today, ever since he made the early dawn red and blue, establishing its very being.

"Isn't it good?" Hunahpu was asked. "Good indeed," he replied. His head was as if it had every bone; it had become like his real head.

After that, they had a talk, they made arrangements with each other:

"How about not playing ball yourself? You should just make lots of threats, while I should be the one to take all the action,"

Xbalanque told him. After that, he gave instructions to a rabbit:

"Your place is there above the court, on top. Stay there among the ball bags," the rabbit was told by Xbalanque, "until the ball comes to you, then take off while I get to work," the rabbit was told. He got his instructions while it was still dark.

After that, when it dawned, both of them were just as well as ever.

And when the ball was dropped in again, it was the head of Hunahpu that rolled over the court:

"We've won! You're done!"

Give up! You lost!" they were told. But even so Hunahpu was shouting:

"Punt the head as a ball!" he told them.

"Well, we're not going to do them any more harm with threats," and with this the lords of Xibalba sent off the ball and

Xbalanque received it, the ball was stopped by his yoke, then he hit it hard and it took off, the ball passed straight out of the court, bouncing just once, just twice, and stopping among the ball bags. Then the rabbit took off hopping, then they went off in pursuit, then all the Xibalbans went off, shouting, shrieking, they went after the rabbit, off went the whole of Xibalba.

After that, the boys got Hunahpu's head back. Then Xbalanque planted the squash; this is when he went to set the squash above the court.

So the head of Hunahpu was really a head again, and the two of them were happy again. And the others, those Xibalbans, were still going on in search of the ball.

After that, having recovered the ball from among the bags, the boys cried out to them:

"Come back! Here's the ball! We've found it!" they said, so they stopped. When the Xibalbans got back:

"Have we been seeing things?" they said. Then they began their ball game again, and they made equal plays on both sides again.

After that, the squash was punted by Xbalanque. The squash was wearing out; it fell on the court, bringing to light its light-colored seeds, as plain as day right in front of them.

"How did you get a hold of that? Where did it come from?" said Xibalba.

With this, the masters of Xibalba were defeated by Hunahpu and Xbalanque. There was great danger there, but they did not die from all the things that were done to them.

Food for thought

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1. Is it possible to stay alive after being beheaded?
2. What is the function of our brain?
3. How can we introduce the brain to children in a fun way?