

Teaming up with a rat

Extracted from *Popol Wuj Part 3*
(English translated version by Dennis Tedlock)

AND now they began to act out their self-revelation before their grandmother and mother. First they made a garden:

“We’ll just do some gardening, our dear grandmother and mother,” they said. “Don’t worry. We’re here, we’re your grandchildren, we’re the successors of our elder brothers,” said Hunahpu and Xbalanque.

And then they took up their axe, their mattock, their hoe; each of them went off with a blowgun on his shoulder. They left the house having instructed their grandmother to give them their food:

“At midday bring our food, dear grandmother,” they said.

“Very well, my dear grandchildren,” said their grandmother.

After that, they went to their gardening. They simply stuck their mattock in the ground, and the mattock simply cultivate the ground.

And it wasn’t only the mattock that cultivated, but also the axe. In the same way, they stuck it in the trunk of a tree; in the same way, it cut into the tree by itself, felling, scattering, felling all the trees and bushes, now leveling, mowing down the trees.

Just the one axe did it, and the mattock, breaking up thick masses, countless stalks and brambles. Just one mattock was doing it, breaking up countless things, just clearing off whole mountains, small and great.

And then they gave instructions to that creature named the mourning dove. They sat up on a big stump, and Hunahpu and Xbalanque said:

“Just watch for our grandmother, bringing our food. Cry out right away when she comes, and then we’ll grab the mattock and axe.”

“Very well,” said the mourning dove.

This is because all they’re doing is shooting; they’re not really doing any gardening.

And as soon as the dove cries out they come running, one of them grabbing the mattock and the other grabbing the hoe, and they’re tying up their hair.

One of them deliberately rubs dirt on his hands; he dirties his face as well, so he’s just like a real gardener.

And as for the other one, he deliberately dumps wood chips on his head, so he’s like a real woodcutter.

Once their grandmother has seen them they eat, but they aren't really doing their gardening; she brings their food for nothing. And when they get home:

"We're really ready for bed, our dear grandmother," they say when they arrive. Deliberately they massage, they stretch their legs, their arms in front of their grandmother.

And when they went on the second day and arrived at the garden, it had all grown up high again. Every tree and bush, every stalk and bramble had put itself back together again when they arrived.

"Who's been picking us clean?" they said.

And these are the ones who are doing it, all the animals, small and great: puma, jaguar, deer, rabbit, fox, coyote, peccary, coati, small birds, great birds. They are the ones who did it; they did it in just one night.

After that, they started the garden all over again. Just as before, the ground worked itself, along with the woodcutting.

And then they shared their thoughts, there on the cleared and broken ground:

"We'll simply have to keep watch over our garden. Then, whatever may be happening here, we'll find out about it," they said when they shared their thoughts. And when they arrived at the house:

"How could we get picked clean, our dear grandmother? Our garden was tall thickets and groves all over again when we got there a while ago, our dear grandmother," they said to their grandmother and mother. "So we'll go keep watch, because what's happening to us is no good," they said.

After that, they wound everything up, and then they went back to the clearing.

And there they took cover, and when they were well hidden there, all the animals gathered together, each one sat on its haunches, all the animals, small and great.

And this was the middle of the night when they came. They all spoke when they came. This is what they said:

"Arise, conjoin, you trees!

Arise, conjoin, you bushes!" they said.

Then they made a great stir beneath the trees and bushes, then they came nearer, and then they showed their faces.

The first of these were the puma and jaguar. The boys tried to grab them, but they did not give themselves up. When the deer and rabbit came near they only got them by the tail, which just broke off: the deer left its tail in their hands. When they grabbed the tail of the deer, along

with the tail of the rabbit, the tails were shortened. But the fox, coyote, and peccary, coati did not give themselves up. All the animals went by in front of Hunahpu and Xbalanque.

So now there was fire in their hearts, because they didn't catch them. And one more came, the last one now, jumping as he came, then they cut him off. In their net they caught the rat.

And then they grabbed him and squeezed him behind the head. They tried to choke him; they burned his tail over a fire. Ever since the rat's tail got caught, there's been no hair on his tail, and his eyes have been the way they are since the boys tried to choke him, Hunahpu and Xbalanque.

"I will not die by your hand! Gardening is not your job, but there is something that is," said the rat.

"Where is what is ours? Go ahead and name it," the boys told the rat.

"Will you let me go then? My word is in my belly, and after I name it for you, you'll give me my morsel of food," said the rat.

"We'll give you your food, so name it," he was told.

"Very well. It's something that belonged to your fathers, named One Hunahpu and Seven Hunahpu, who died in Xibalba.

What remains is their gaming equipment. They left it up under the roof of the house: their kilts, their wrist guards, their rubber ball. But your grandmother doesn't take these down in front of you, because this is how your fathers died."

"You know the truth, don't you!" the boys told the rat.

There was great joy in their hearts when they got word of the rubber ball. When the rat had named it they gave the rat his food, and this is his food: corn kernels, squash seeds, chili, beans, pataxte, cacao. These are his.

"If anything of yours is stored or gets wasted, then gnaw away," the rat was told by Hunahpu and Xbalanque.

"Very well, boys. But what will your grandmother say if she sees me?" he said.

"Don't be fainthearted. We're here. We know what our grandmother needs to be told. We'll set you up under the corner of the roof right away. When that's taken care of you'll go straight to where the things were left, and we'll look up there under the roof, but it's our stew we'll be looking at," they told the rat when they gave him his instructions.

Hunahpu and Xbalanque made their plans overnight and arrived right at noon, and it wasn't obvious that they had a rat with them when they arrived. One of them went right inside

the house when he reached it, while the other went to the corner of the house, quickly setting up the rat. And then they asked their grandmother for their meal:

“Just grind something for our stew, we want chili sauce, our dear grandmother,” they said.

After that, she ground chili for their stew. A bowl of broth was set out in front of them, but they were just fooling their grandmother and mother. They had emptied the water jar:

“We’re really parched! Bring us a drink,” they told their grandmother.

“Yes,” she said, then she went, and they kept on eating. They weren’t really hungry; they just put on false appearances.

And then they saw the rat reflected in their chili sauce: here was the rat loosening the ball that had been left in the peak of the roof. When they saw him in the chili sauce they sent a mosquito, that creature the mosquito, similar to a gnat. He went to the water, then he punctured the side of the grandmother’s jar. The water just gushed out from the side of her jar. She tried, but she could not stop up the side of her jar.

“What has our grandmother done? We’re choking for lack of water, our parched throats will do us in,” they told their mother, then they sent her there.

After that, the rat cut the ball loose. It dropped from beneath the roof, along with the yokes, wrist guards, kilts. These were taken away then; they went to hide them on the road, the road to the ball court.

After that, they went to join their grandmother at the water, and their grandmother and mother were unable to stop up the side of the jar, either one of them.

After that, the boys arrived, each with his blowgun. When they arrived at the water:

“What have you done? We got weary at heart, so we came,” they said.

“Look at the side of my jar! It cannot be stopped,” said their grandmother, and they quickly stopped it up.

And they came back together, the two of them ahead of their grandmother.

In this way, the matter of the rubber ball was arranged.

Food for thought

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1. Do you think that animals are clever? In what ways are they clever?

2. Have you ever talked to an animal (e.g., your pet) before and felt that it can understand you?
Can you think of an alternative reason for the animal's behaviour (e.g., it was just a coincidence, not that the animal had understood you)?
3. Do you think that it is important to think about something (e.g., news or blog post) critically instead of accepting it blindly? Why or why not?