KOKOPELLI

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Episode 1 of 6

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FADE IN:

EXT. ABOVE TEOTIHUACAN - NIGHT

A full moon hangs over TEOTIHUACAN. Dimly visible white adobe compounds surround a white stuccoed stone city. At the center, the broad Avenue of the Dead links two large, squat pyramids. The only other light is a flame atop the larger pyramid and it flickers out.

EXT. PYRAMID OF THE SUN TOP PLATFORM - CONTINUOUS

Costumed nobles gather around a stone altar as black-robed priests sweep away hot ash. Two warriors assemble a fire drill. A GONG breaks the silence.

KABANG!

One warrior pushes a shaft down with a flat stone onto a small wood chip. Another loops a bowstring around it and saws furiously.

XLANGL, 55, the Royal Regent, dressed in a large eagle costume of red and white feathers, towers over the others. He leans down whispering to a similarly dressed person standing nearby.

XLANGL
Get ready for the lighting of your sacred fire, my Lord. Everybody will see you first, so stay calm and try to look big.

ARAX, 36, Supreme Lord, wiggles his ample frame under the garish costume. Next to him stands JUJU, 16, (Jujuleptxlotl).

JUJU
Get this thing over with. My back is killing me.

ARAX
I agree, my little gecko. I'm cold and this ridiculous costume itches.

JUJU
I don't feel so good, Daddy. I think I'm going to throw up.

XLANGL
Stick to what we rehearsed and walk to your marks. It'll all be over soon enough.

Arax uses one feathered arm in a vain attempt to scratch his rear.

ARAX
Not before my butt falls off.

The two warriors continue spinning the stick with the string bow. The bottom of the stick glows dull red with every push and pull of the bow string.

A black-robed priest nests dry fluff on the ember and blows.

FLAME.

Twigs and grass catch.

A warrior carries the new fire to the altar. Stacked wood erupts, its glow flashing from the giant curved gong above the city.

Two priests strike the gong from either side.

KABOOM! KABOOM!

The yellow beam vibrates with the sound. As it dies out, a distant sound echoes back growing louder.

CROWD ROAR

XLANGL
This is my cue. I'll be right back.

Xlangl places a small piece of dried material in his mouth and steps to the edge of the platform. the altar fire now lights up the entire top of the pyramid.

Xlangl spreads his feathered wings and eerily glow. He morphs into a giant colorful feathered serpent with the head, wings and claws of an eagle. It takes flight trailing a streamer of colored sparkles.

SCREECH!

The flying serpent-eagle circles as warriors carry torches down the pyramid. Below, points of fire spread out along the crowded avenues heading away from the city in all directions.

The glowing serpent-eagle returns to the pyramid platform and morphs back into Xlangl. He steps to the edge and looks out at the many dots of light streaming away from the city.

Two black-clad priests struggle to hold a giant conch shell high enough for Xlangl's mouth.

Xlangl raises his feathered wings and the crowd roar from below fades. He yells into the conch, amplifying his voice.

XLANGL (cont'd)
GODS, NOBLES AND ALL THE GREAT PEOPLE OF THE FIVE NATIONS!
THE CITY OF THE GODS AND HOME OF THE GREAT MIXTEC NATION, WELCOME YOU!

CROWD ROAR

XLANGL (cont'd)
OUR LORD CELEBRATES THE FIRST KA'TUN OF HIS SACRED RULE.
THE GODS GIVE LIFE THROUGH THE SUPREME LORD. HE REPLENISHES OUR FIRES WITH FRESH SPIRITS AND GOOD LUCK.

Xlangl turns and bows deeply as Arax steps forward. Juju steps up beside him.

CROWD ROAR

Xlangl raises his wings and the crowd quiets. The priests struggle even more to hold the heavy conch in place.

XLANGL (cont'd)
OUR SUPREME LORD HAS COMMANDED, A GREAT BALLGAME IN TLALOC'S HONOR...BE PLAYED BY THE BEST TEAMS FROM EACH OF THE FIVE GREAT NATIONS.

CROWD ROAR

Xlangl raises his wings and the crowd quiets.

XLANGL (cont'd)
THE GODS WILL GRANT ROYAL STATUS FOR THE WINNING CAPTAIN AND WARRIOR CLAN!

CROWD ROAR WITH ADDED SOUNDS OF WHISTLES, TRUMPETS, DRUMS AND RATTLES.

EXT. AVENUE OF THE DEAD - CONTINUOUS

Warrior clans, in five tight groups of twenty-four each, stand together in formation along the Avenue of the Dead facing the great Pyramid. Each group has flags with different identifying colors and matching costumes.

Xlangl speaks in the background, one of the clan captains, NXMUL, 22, (Monkey-Python) dressed in green and yellow, stares at another captain on his left, with glaring hatred.

ARABL, 21, (Serpent-Eagle), dressed in red and white, stares with rapture at the top of the pyramid and shakes his rattle adorned arm with the crowd response.

XLANGL O.C.
OUR SUPREME LORD WITH TLALOC'S BLESSING, OFFERS JUJULEPTXLOTL, HIS BELOVED AND ONLY DAUGHTER, TO BE FAITHFULLY MATED WITH THE WINNER.

CROWD ROARS

Different colored bonfires erupt from the many smaller pyramids lining the avenue. The avenue is crowded with thousands of people all dancing and making noise.

Nxmul frowns, and motions to his lieutenant, COLTAL, 17, (Two-Fang Bat) to move next to him. A young thin warrior steps forward and salutes.

COLTAL
Your majesty.

Nxmul points out the red and white captain staring at the top of the pyramid. He turns and shouts into Coltal's ear.

NXMUL
Follow that captain. I want to know if I should fear him.

CROWD ROAR

EXT. PYRAMID OF THE SUN TOP PLATFORM - CONTINUOUS

XLANGL
LONG LIVE OUR SUPREME LORD! LONG LIVE OUR PRINCESS! AND LONG LIVE THE NEW PRINCE TO COME!
LET THE GAMES BEGIN!

KABOOM!

The two conch holders almost collapse. Ignoring them, Xlangl flourishes his wings blocking the view from below of Arax and Juju. A priest steps forward and throws some powder in the flames.

The fire explodes with huge red ball of fire.

KABOOM!

The two priests lifting the conch fall backward and accidentally drop it, breaking it to pieces. When the flames die back, only priests and warriors are left visible on the platform.

FADE TO BLACK

FADE IN:

EXT. TEOTIHUACAN RIVER BANK GARDEN - EARLY EVENING

Couples dressed in fine feathered cloaks walk along a stone-lined river through a garden of exotic trees and many upright stone stele honoring past kings and powerful gods.

Larger stele line the opposite shore with the great pyramid and brightly painted buildings close behind.

Coltal, leans against a white stele watching the passing couples with a cold grimace.

COLTAL
First night in the greatest city on earth, and I'm on duty! Looking for some jerk that should be drinking or fucking tonight, and I'm not!

He slaps himself on the forehead. A young couple pass by holding each other closely. They look at him suspiciously.

He hikes up his cloak, finds a clay pipe packed with herbs, then fumbles an ember from a pouch, dropping it and watching its red glow die. Movement nearby stops him cold.

ARABL, appears in front of him, holding out a glowing coal in a small box.

ARABL
Fire, brother?

Coltal jerks upright, dropping his pouch.

COLTAL
Uh.... Thanks. Uh.... Brother.

ARABL
You're welcome.

Arabl leans in and lights Coltal's clay pipe. Coltal sucks on it while eyeing Arable, then blows out a big cloud of smoke.

COLTAL
Wanna hit?

Coltal changes his frown to a forced smile. Arabl smiles back.

ARABL
No. But you enjoy. I notice you are a ball player. Omec, I believe.

Coltal takes another hit, dumps the burned material out, picks up his pouch and puts the pipe carefully back in his robe.

COLTAL
Tikal.

ARABL
Yes, Tikal. I couldn't help but notice your colors. Welcome! Welcome to Teotihuacan, City of the Gods!

He sweeps his arm around, encompassing all the brightly painted buildings and shrines glowing orange from the setting sun.

COLTAL
We're here to beat you in the games.

ARABL
I know. But don't bet the farm. Enjoy your stay and don't let losing a ball game spoil your visit. I'm sure you're good, from...

COLTAL
Tikal.

ARABL
Right. Tikal. Well, this, on the other hand, is the big time, so no shame in losing to the best.

Arabl smiles broadly, turns and walks away toward the river.

COLTAL
(Whispering)
Oh yeah!? Well we're going to win!
You pompous royal snake.

Arabl does not hear and keeps walking.

Coltal nervously fidgets in his clothing pulling out a jade knife. He fumbles, dropping it, breaking the blade in half.

COLTAL (cont'd)
SON OF A BITCH!

Arabl disappears over the stone river embankment. Coltal picks up the broken knife and follows. When he gets to the embankment, he peers down to the river and sees Arabl near a sewage outlet flowing offal into the river.

Arabl pulls a large wicker basket coated in tar from a niche in the wall. He puts it in the water, climbs in on his knees and paddles across the slow flowing river.

COLTAL (cont'd)
Now why would the Teotihuacan ball captain visit a sewer behind the palace?

SERVANT GIRL #1, 13, appears from behind a large stela on the opposite shore.

WHISTLE SOUND

Arabl waves to her and steps out of the basket, ties it up, and disappears behind the stela with her.

COLTAL (cont'd)
And the plot thickens like a shit-filled sewer on bad jalapeno day.

He wrinkles his nose and wraps his robe around his face as he backs away from the river bank and squats down against a tree trunk.

EXT. PALACE HIDDEN GARDEN - CONTINUOUS

JUJU wanders the palace's hidden river garden, past a pond and small menagerie. An animal GROWL freezes her.

JUJU
(quietly)
Is that my pet?

ARABL O.C.
G-r-r-o-w-a-l! Your loving jaguar has returned.

Arabl emerges from the brush. Juju flies into his arms. They kiss, then he kneels and lays a tender hand beneath her gown, on her swollen belly.

ARABL
I thank the gods nobody knows our little secret yet.

JUJU
I'm afraid it's not that easy, my love. All it takes is one servant to blab. And if my father finds out...

Arabl stands up with a serious look and grabs her in his arms. She swoons softly.

ARABL
Almost over, little hummingbird. Win next week and I become noble. Then we marry, and our son may one day rule.

Arabl kisses her, but Juju grimaces and turns away.

JUJU
But what if something happens? What if you're injured and someone else wins? Then what? You could end up sacrificed!

ARABL
That's a bad dream. No one has defeated the Serpent-Eagle team. It's the one thing I can truly promise without any help from the gods. I will win and I will have you as my bride!

She puts her fingers to his mouth.

JUJU
Shhh! That's blasphemy. Don't anger the gods. Not now. We need all the help we can get.

Arabl shakes his head in disagreement. He attempts to kiss her while stroking her hair. Juju smiles weakly and gives in to a deep kiss. She abruptly breaks off.

JUJU (cont'd)
My servants gossip about Tikal's prince, Monkey Python. He's boasting to all the nobles he will win. He's never been defeated either.

Arabl touches his fingers to her mouth.

ARABL
When will the baby come?

JUJU
Spider Lady says soon, but I should stay quiet and not get excited if I'm going to carry till after the games.

ARABL
Don't be afraid my love. I will never let anything happen to you or our baby.

They kiss passionately, sinking down on the grass.

EXT. TEOTIHUACAN RIVER BANK GARDEN - LATER THAT NIGHT

A lantern glows behind the stela. Arabl joins Juju. They kiss, then part, fingers lingering.

Arabl descends the bank to the basket boat and paddles back across the river. Juju blows him a kiss and disappears behind the stele.

Coltal pulls out the broken jade knife, and ducks behind a nearby statue. Arabl walks by holding a paddle and whistling.

Coltal emerges behind him holding the knife down low. But two warriors appear and Coltal hides the knife and turns away briefly.

The warriors eye him suspiciously as they walk by. He looks back but Arabl has disappeared in the dark.

COLTAL
My lord will not like this.

He smiles wickedly.

COLTAL (cont'd)
Not one bit.

INT. SPIDER LADY'S TAVERN - NIGHT

Nobles lounge on cushions with cacao and pipes. SERVANT GIRL #1 crosses to a thin, weathered man alone at the rear: SPIDER LADY'S SERVANT, 50.

SERVANT GIRL #1
I was told to give this to Spider Lady. My mistress will be needing her soon.

She slides a leather pouch across to him. He grabs it and puts it in his robe. He pushes a folded leaf packet over to her.

SPIDER LADY SERVANT
Give her this powder for the pain. Bring her here when the contractions happen often and regular.

Coltal enters and sees Servant Girl #1 and Spider Lady Servant at the rear. He pulls his hood up and sits quietly at a table nearby.

SERVANT GIRL #1
You must not say a word of this to anyone. Xlangl will punish severely any who do.

He smiles through missing teeth. After she leaves, Coltal joins the servant and slides him a gold nugget. The man grins.

SPIDER LADY SERVANT
And what can I do for you?

EXT. BALL COURT MONTAGE - NEXT DAY

Two teams enter in full regalia, salute their supporters, then strip to padded uniforms and warm up with the rubber ball.

Colorfully dressed nobles crowd the walls, wagering beneath giant fans. The Supreme Lord arrives on a palanquin, pampered by two young attendants.

A one-armed veteran referee whistles and drops the ball. Both teams collide, clearing a lane for their captains.

Nxmul and Coltal drive forward, batting the ball between them while Tikal blockers hammer the defense.

A defender breaks through and reaches for the ball. Tikal players isolate and beat him down before the referee's whip separates them. Slaves drag him away.

Arabl bursts through Tikal's line, leaps, and shoulders the ball through the hoop.

The crowd goes wild. Supreme Lord is handed money bags as he jumps up and down with joy hugging his two boys.

Behind the end wall, Coltal slips obsidian blades into his arm padding. Nxmul catches him, approves, and sends him back in.

Coltal rakes an opponent with the hidden blades. Arabl spots it, tackles him, tears one free, and slashes Coltal's wrist.

Coltal flees, clutching his bleeding arm. Nxmul charges, slips, and falls. Arabl knocks the ball through the hoop. The crowd erupts. Nxmul rises, blood-smeared and furious.

Arabl is carried on the shoulders of his teammates around the court to the loud noise from his fans.

Supreme Lord dances in place as he is lifted on his palanquin and turned in circles. More money bags are thrown onto the revolving royal platform as the young boys struggle to collect them all.

END MONTAGE:

EXT. OUTSIDE BALL COURT - CONTINUOUS

Nxmul finds Coltal behind the court binding his wrist with bandages. Spider Lady Servant, lurks nearby. Nxmul pulls Coltal close and hisses at him.

NXMUL
Give me one reason why I shouldn't cut your heart out and feed it to Tlaloc!

COLTAL
My Lord. I failed you. I should have cut him first. But I have learned something important.

NXMUL
What could be more important than losing to Juju's secret lover?

COLTAL
Knowing that Juju is giving birth right now at Spider Lady's.

Nxmul freezes, then begins seething with even more anger.

NXMUL
Are you telling me I've been betrayed!? Made the fool!?

Nxmul holds up a small bag in his hand. He pauses and then drops it at Coltal's feet.

NXMUL (cont'd)
Here, buy a slave for the sacrifice. You might still prove useful, even if you can't handle a sword anymore.

He deliberately bumps Coltal's bandaged arm as he leaves.

COLTAL
(Coltal has a nearly useless right hand for the rest of the story)
O-o-w-w-w-e-e-e! Thank you lord! Thank you. I'll be your undying servant for life!

INT. SPIDER LADY'S TAVERN BACK ROOM - NIGHT

Juju squats over pillows while SPIDER LADY kneels in front. Servant Girl #1 stands behind supporting Juju as she contorts and cries out in pain. Spider Lady hands her a potion to drink.

SPIDER LADY
Here. Drink, my sweet princess. This will give you strength. Push when you feel the pain. Breathe! Keep breathing!

JUJU
A-a-a-i-i-e-e-h! Come my little one! G-a-h-a-e-e-i-i-a! Oh mighty Gods!... help me!

Nxmul flings open the door. His team players are seen behind him cornering and killing two servants.

NXMUL
IT'S TRUE! You've been despoiled by a common snake!

SPIDER LADY
You can't be here! Get out!

NXMUL
I'm Monkey Python, son of Stormy Sky, prince of mighty Tikal! She was to be my virgin wife!

Nxmul grabs Spider Lady, pulling her away from Juju.

NXMUL (cont'd)
WHORE! This heresy must stop!

JUJU
I-i-e-e-a-g-g-h! He's coming!

Juju bears down. A blue-pink baby slips onto the pillows. Spider Lady bites through the cord, gives him to Juju, then faces Nxmul.

SPIDER LADY
Get out, you filthy dog!

She beats on his chest. Nxmul slaps her aside. He snatches the baby away from Juju.

NXMUL
I'll take care of this abomination!

He swings the baby over his head but it slips out of his grasp and slams against the wall behind Servant Girl #1. Juju screams and pounds Nxmul with her fists.

JUJU
A-i-e-e-i You murderer! Monster! Arabl will have your head! I will eat your still-bleeding liver!

Servant Girl #1 scoops up the baby, wraps him hurriedly in cloth, and runs from the room.

NXMUL
You were promised to be a virgin princess and I was cheated by that old queer you call a father. You belong to me! We're going to Tikal! Tonight!

Nxmul grabs Juju and throws her over his shoulder. Spider Lady attacks him as he carries Juju out of the room, taking a powder from her robe and throwing it in his face.

SPIDER LADY
I curse you, Monkey Python! Tlaloc will eat your black heart from the inside out!

INT. COURTYARD SUPREME LORD'S PALACE - LATER

Servant Girl #1 runs into the palace courtyard carrying a cloth bundle and screaming.

SERVANT GIRL #1
Help! Help! The prince is injured! I need help!

She kneels placing a small bundle of bloody cloth on the floor. Two guards, GUARD ONE, 25, and GUARD TWO, 20, carrying large obsidian spears, hurry into the courtyard followed by Xlangl.

XLANGL
What's going on?!

A servant unwraps the trembling infant. A massive bruise bows his spine. He gasps and cries. Xlangl's anger hardens.

XLANGL (cont'd)
I warn you, your next words might be your last.

SERVANT GIRL #1
My lord! I'm sorry. I should have killed the monster who did this!

XLANGL
Is this Juju's baby?

Servant Girl #1 shakes with fear but nods yes.

XLANGL (cont'd)
And Serpent Eagle Captain, Arabl, the father?

Servant Girl #1 looks up fearfully. Then with quivering lips nods yes, looks down and begins crying. Xlangl nods to Servant Girl #2 kneeling over the baby.

XLANGL (cont'd)
Take the baby to my rooms and tend to it.

Servant Girl #2 picks up the bundle and leaves. Xlangl helps Servant Girl #1 up.

XLANGL (cont'd)
Calmly now. Where's Juju and her guards? Was the baby born that way?

SERVANT GIRL #1
No! Tikal captain do this! He angry, kill guards, try kill prince, maybe kill Juju. I grab baby and run.

He looks at her with softening eyes.

XLANGL
You did well. Go to your room and say no more.

He gives her a jade nugget. She backs away bowing.

XLANGL (cont'd)
Captain!

GUARD ONE
My Lord!

XLANGL
Take some warriors to Spider Lady's tavern and bring back Juju. If you see the Tikal ball captain, Monkey Python, arrest him.

GUARD ONE
Immediately, sir!

XLANGL
Oh, and one thing more. I suspect an inside traitor. Interrogate all who work for Spider Lady and find the culprit.

GUARD ONE
I'll personally see to it.

Guard One rushes out.

XLANGL
Sergeant!

GUARD TWO
Lord!

XLANGL
Send orders to have Serpent Eagle Captain assemble his warriors on the plaza by sunrise. Tell him to prepare for long travel.
(MORE)

XLANGL (cont'd)
Then sound the general alarm and have five of our best warrior clans ready to march with full gear by daybreak.

GUARD TWO
Sir! Yes sir!

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. PYRAMID PLAZA AVENUE OF THE DEAD - BEFORE SUNRISE

It is raining and Arabl stands at attention in front of his warrior clan. In the background other warriors are assembling into troops. Xlangl walks out of the palace with two guards followed by a large bosomed woman carrying a cradle basket on her back.

Xlangl hands a folded skin to Arabl.

XLANGL
Here's a map of the northern hinterlands and a royal pass. Take your son to my daughter, Popoxtalgipta. She is a well-known shaman living among the cliff dwellers.

ARABL
Please, lord! Let me and my men save her from that monster.

Xlangl looks at him with pity.

XLANGL
He is Stormy Sky's grandson, heir to Tikal. If we attempt a rescue, Juju dies. Deliver the boy to my daughter Popo, then disappear. For the child's sake, tell no one.

Arabl fights tears, salutes, and signals the march. His clan departs in the rain with the wet nurse and child.

XLANGL (cont'd)
You don't know how much I wish I could go with you.

INT. SUPREME LORD'S BEDROOM - DAYTIME

ARAX sprawls face-down on a mountain of pillows while a young attendant massages him. Xlangl smokes nearby in a blue haze.

ARAX
Why me? I did my part.

XLANGL
Destiny rarely asks permission.

ARAX
You promised this would work.

XLANGL
Love ruined the plan.

XLANGL (cont'd)
We caught the informer at Spider Lady's. If he survives interrogation, he will be sacrificed by sunset.

ARAX
Anything left to watch?

XLANGL
No. But Monkey Python sent this.

Xlangl presents a message stick threaded with coded, multicolored knots. Arax recoils.

ARAX
My father should have destroyed Tikal when he had the chance.

He dismisses the attendant and wraps himself in a purple robe.

XLANGL
Monkey Python claims Juju as his wife and queen. Intervene, and he sacrifices her.

ARAX
My daughter is captive, my grandson exiled, and Tikal invokes the old war between the two Quetzalcoatls. What am I supposed to do?

XLANGL
Tikal claims the feathered serpent gives it the right to rule. Holding Juju makes this look like a family dispute, not an invasion. Your bloodline now strengthens theirs.

ARAX
Honor demands I punish him. The stars demand caution.

Arax crumples. Xlangl reluctantly pats his shoulder.

XLANGL
Hold together. You are Supreme Lord. Your father charged me to guide you, and I have.

ARAX
You have been more father than adviser.

XLANGL
This is larger than one kidnapping.

ARAX
What is larger than my daughter's life?

XLANGL
A priesthood that grows stronger with every blood sacrifice.
We have blockaded Tikal, but war would kill Juju. Our hidden advantage is her newborn son.

ARAX
That broken child? The stars do not even acknowledge him.

XLANGL
The idea of a hidden prince is enough to challenge any usurper.

Arax toys with a wooden model: twin hulls, a platform, and a pivoting arm with a leather sling.

XLANGL (cont'd)
While the noble clans believe the prince lives, they hesitate.
Teotihuacan controls trade. No one wants to stop the flow of wealth.

Arax holds up the wooden model.

ARAX
What is this? A boat to carry you home?

XLANGL
A weapon I saw in Egypt. I am building one at the coast--in case caution fails.

ARAX
Do what you must. Next time, warn me before the ceremony.

Arax claps. Young attendants hurry in.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. TIKAL PYRAMID - DAY

Aerial view of a large city surrounded by brown farm fields zooms in showing Tikal's great pyramid complex.

The view focuses in on a set of buildings behind the largest pyramid next to a ball court.

INT. TIKAL LORD'S PALACE - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Juju is reclining on pillows covered with feather blankets. She looks pale and haggard. Four priests burn incense, chant and wave feathers over her.

NXMUL
No more delays! My doctors tell me you are perfectly fine and capable of another child.

JUJU
No my lord. I am still ill. Surely I will die if...

NXMUL
Enough! I have put up with your female problems too long. You are now my wife and you must produce a new heir to the Supreme Lord's throne. The doctors tell me you bleed on schedule and this is your fertile time.

JUJU
No! I will never give you a child! I hate you!

NXMUL
All the better. Hold her!

He rips off her blankets revealing her naked body. The priests grab hold of her limbs and two pull her legs apart as she struggles to fight them.

JUJU
Let me go! Eeeeiiiiyaaaa!

NXMUL
Stuff a rag in her mouth!

One priest holding her arm, forces a wad of cloth into her mouth.

NXMUL (cont'd)
Come here you whore wife! Let me pay you for your pleasure.

Nxmul strips his loincloth off, kneels in front of her and pulls her body up by the buttocks and penetrates her violently. He thrusts into her repeatedly while she thrashes and attempts to scream.

NXMUL (cont'd)
Ugh! Take that! Aagh! And that!

He pulls out a knife and makes slight cuts in her skin while continuing to rape her. He crudely scratches a picture of a monstrous face on her belly until he arches his back in orgasm. He makes more cut marks on his groin and hers mixing the blood together as he loudly chants prayers.

NXMUL (cont'd)
A-a-a-a-a-g-g-h! Gods of the underworld! Give me a demon spirit! Bring me power!

The cuts glow red. Juju strains against her bonds as Nxmul laughs. A black serpent-wisp coils through the chamber and plunges into her. She arches, then collapses. Nxmul raises the bloody knife in triumph.

NXMUL (cont'd)
Y-i-h-y-i-h-y-i-h-e-h-e-i-i-e-i!

EXT. DESERT SPIRIT WORLD - DAY

Pink sand glows beneath a lavender sky. A blue rabbit bounds beside a multicolored sparrow, then flickers into Koko's bent, childlike form. A striped jaguar approaches--and bathes him with an enormous affectionate lick before curling around him.

POPO
My little Koko rabbit listens to sparrows in the Nagual. You're going to be a natural.

An orange sun dances over the distant neon-green glowing mountains.

EXT. DESERT NEAR POPO'S HUT - CONTINUOUS

The colors drain to desert brown. The rabbit becomes KOKO, 2, his spine bent, cradled by POPO, 32, beside a plain adobe hut.

POPO
(singing a lullaby)
Sleep softly my sweet baby, sleep tight to my breast. Tomorrow is rushing to us, so now sleep caress.

The baby smiles and snuggles in her arms. She rocks him gently to sleep.

INT. TIKAL LORD'S PALACE - NIGHT

Juju thrashes on a pillowed birthing platform. Two young SLAVE WOMEN wipe her brow and steady her.

SLAVE WOMAN #1
Here. Take this. The doctor said it will ease your pain.

She sips from the pot and then has a strong contraction. Slave Woman #2 stands back fearful. Slave Woman #1 helps Juju get into a squatting position.

SLAVE WOMAN #1 (cont'd)
I'll hold you. Breath and push!

Juju bears down and stifles a scream. Nxmul comes into the room followed by Coltal dressed in priests black robes.

COLTAL
We must make a sacrifice now if we are to summon a spirit from the underworld to help your son be born. We need clean innocent blood.

NXMUL
It's too late to bring someone up from the pens.

Nxmul turns facing Slave Woman #2. Before she can react, he slashes her throat.

NXMUL (cont'd)
Quick! Help me put her on the altar.

At Nxmul's signal, Coltal lifts the dying captive onto the altar. Blood runs through carved channels into a clay bowl.

COLTAL
My lord. I'm afraid if we use female blood, we might...

NXMUL
Man or woman, my loins have made the next Supreme Lord!

JUJU
Oh my gods! A-a-h-h-r-g! E-e-i-i-k.

Coltral goes to Juju and stuffs an ugly paste in her mouth. She fights against it but swallows some.

COLTAL
The spirit world of the gods needs to be revealed to the baby while still in the womb. Datura and some morning glory seeds should help.

He forces another swallow, then Slave Woman #1 gives Juju pulque. Drugged, she sways. A sick green light pulses beneath her skin.

JUJU
I can't see you! All I can see is swirling black shapes. Go away!

She flails her arms. Her groin glows greenish yellow and black wispy plumes leak out of her vagina. She screams.

NXMUL
Wait for the blood!

Nxmul races the bowl beneath Juju as she pushes. The baby drops into it through a burst of green vapor, a luminous cord trailing behind.

COLTAL
Catch him in the bowl!

The infant strikes the bowl. Blood SIZZLES. Nxmul recoils. Juju collapses as Slave Woman #1 severs the cord and reaches for the child. Coltal lifts the dark, blood-covered baby--its eyes pulse green.

COLTAL (cont'd)
It's a girl!

Coltal looks fearfully at Nxmul.

NXMUL
I don't care. My child will give birth to the next thousand lords of the civilized world!

Nxmul takes the bowl and holding it high, begins chanting.

NXMUL (cont'd)
May the great dark gods below,
Claim this child. Make her your own.
Bring your will and power to Tikal,
Rule us with glory and honor.
Let Xixichupaka conquer all!

FADE TO BLACK

INT. POPO'S ADOBE HUT - NIGHT

A single lamp lights Popo's hut. KOKO, 6, plays a mournful flute melody while POPO, 36, grinds herbs. She fights a tear. Koko limps over, settles beside her, and tugs her robe. She gives him a brave smile.

KOKO
I love you Mama-Popo. I want to make you happy.

She continues grinding with a thin smile on her lips. She stops, looks at him again and speaks with a soothing voice.

POPO
I love you more, Mea-Koko. You're getting good. I love hearing you play. It makes me feel warm and pleasant. It makes me happy, even when I cry.

KOKO
I love playing it. I want to spread joy like we spread seeds in the spring. It grows wherever it lands. Like your lessons.
(recites)
Love is better than hate.
Smart is better than dumb.
Give is better than take.
Truth is better than lies.
Include is better than exclude.
Nature is better than gods.

Koko claps his hands excitedly.

POPO
(proudly)
You're absolutely right!

She puts down her mano stone, turns to Koko with her arms spread apart. Koko happily falls into her arms for a big hug smothered with kisses.

POPO (cont'd)
Since you were brought to me, you have made this lonely woman happier than I could ever want.

KOKO
Tell me again! Tell me the story of how I came to live with you.

He snuggles in her lap as she tells the story.

BEGIN FLASHBACK MONTAGE

EXT. POPO'S ADOBE HUT - NIGHT

POPO
(narration over montage)
It was a cold and rainy night. I heard a racket outdoors. When I looked, I saw a troop of Supreme Lord's warriors, still dressed in ceremonial clothes but dirty and tired.

Arabl approaches with his warriors much reduced in numbers. He carries a bundle in his arms. When he gets to the hut, Popo appears in the doorway.

ARABL
Are you Popomagipta?

Popo nods her head yes.

POPO
(narration over montage)
They had been running hard for weeks to bring you to me. Their leader, Serpent Eagle, delivered you to me on the orders of Supreme Lord himself and my father, Xlangl, the chief regent.

Arabl hands her the folded skin he was given by Xlangl.

ARABL
Your father commanded and the gods allowed that I bring you my son, Kokopelli, Supreme Lord's grandson and heir to the throne.

Popo reads the skin and looks up as he pushes the bundle into her arms. Popo opens the bundle carefully exposing the tiny squirming deformed baby.

POPO
I'll take care of him from here. You can go.

Popo turns back into the hut. Arabl returns to his warriors, goes to each one, kisses them, and walks away alone into the darkness. The remaining warriors look at each other and walk away, but one begins running after Arabl.

POPO (cont'd)
(narration over montage)
He sent you to me to keep safe from your Grandfather's enemies and to educate and train you for your eventual destiny.

END OF MONTAGE

KOKO
What's a destiny?

POPO
It's a possible future you already know about.

KOKO
What if I don't know about it?

POPO
Then that's fate.

EXT. TULUM HARBOR DOCKS - DAY

Seagoing canoes crowd wooden wharves. One twin-hulled cargo canoe carries a broad central platform. COLTAL, 26, approaches in a palanquin, wearing black robes and a monstrous raven headdress. Townspeople reluctantly bow. A tomato sails from the crowd.

Priests seize a random man and execute him. At the dock, Coltal descends before BASKING SHARK, 35, a trader in a shark-jaw headdress.

BASKING SHARK
Welcome, great priest. I am Basking Shark, Tulum's finest sea trader. I am your humble but loyal servant here in Tulum.

Basking Shark bows. Coltal surveys slaves racing between warehouses and ships, each burdened with oversized pots and bales.

COLTAL
Spare me the ceremony.

Coltal brushes past Basking Shark as he surveys he docks.

COLTAL (cont'd)
Monkey Python, your new king, sent me to verify your reports.

He turns abruptly to face Basking Shark.

COLTAL (cont'd)
You pay twice the required tax. What are you doing that is so profitable?

BASKING SHARK
Why nothing special my lord. Just the usual smuggling. Come. I will show you.

He leads Coltal toward a warehouse where slaves unload bales of green leaves.

BASKING SHARK (cont'd)
The leaves come from the Inxka highlands. Their people chew them for strength and endurance.

BASKING SHARK (cont'd)
Mixed with local tobacco, slaves become addicted. We control their supply so they can be made to work harder, eat less, and require fewer guards.

Coltal studies a laborer carrying an impossible load. One cheek bulges as he chews on something.

BASKING SHARK (cont'd)
Prepared with ash, the leaves give vitality and endurance. Soon they demand it. It will transform labor and make slave owners richer.

COLTAL
The priesthood owns the most slaves in the world. We have an unlimited supply. If I can earn another 10 percent using modern technology, then my lord and by extension, me and you, gain 10 percent. How much medicine do you have?

BASKING SHARK
Enough right now for every Tikal slave. And with my many twin-hulled cargo canoes, I can soon supply all Five Nations.

COLTAL
Excellent!

INT. POPO'S ADOBE HUT - DAY

KOKO
What's a god?

POPO
Oh Koko, if you could only hear yourself when you get older.

Popo invites Koko to sit in her lap.

KOKO
I've been thinking about my destiny. You said my grandfather makes me important. But my grandfather is a god. Does that make me a god?

Popo laughs.

POPO
Nobody is a god. Gods are imaginary beings we invent as characters in our myths and origin stories. It's how the people are taught to work together for the common good and not fight each other.
(MORE)

POPO (cont'd)
If they have a common idea, such as an immortal all powerful god protecting them and making them feel special, then they feel secure and happy.

KOKO
Like how I feel living with you?

POPO
Yes. And that is why the people feel better knowing your grandfather is looking out for them and keeping them safe. By pretending to be a god, he can make them feel even more secure.

KOKO
I don't want to be a god. I don't want to be a Lord. Too many things can go wrong and then what? The people need more than what a humped back flute player can give them.

POPO
Now don't value yourself short. What have I taught you?

KOKO
That you're only as good as you think you are and to face your fate with a strong heart and keen eye.

POPO
We don't know what might happen tomorrow, but with a warriors vision and the wizards wisdom, we will prevail and make the world a better place for all.

She tickles his side and he laughs. She kisses him on his tummy and face. She turns him over and kisses his hump. He giggles and squirms with delight.

INT. TIKAL PALACE NURSURY - DAY

Juju confronts a slave nursemaid.

JUJU
I demand to see my daughter!

NURSEMAID
I've been given strict orders not to let you have any contact with the princess.

JUJU
But I'm his mother. Don't you have any feeling about what I'm going through?

NURSEMAID
I do. I'm a mother too. That's why I have to be obedient and so should you.

A guard steps up next to Nursemaid brandishing a sword.

JUJU
I understand. Can you at least give her my present. Tell her its from me. I want her to be happy.

Juju reaches into her bodice and removes a frightened little green parrot. She hands it to Nursemaid.

JUJU (cont'd)
Maybe she'll like it and think of me.

She hands the bird to Nursemaid.

NURSEMAID
Ok. Now you must go. I don't want any trouble.

Juju turns slowly and leaves. Nursemaid takes the little bird and takes it to a cradle in the room. She carefully puts the bird in the cradle.

GRRRRR WHACK! TWEAK!

Green feathers come flying out of the cradle. Nursemaid backs up in horror.

EXT. DESERT SPIRIT WORLD - EVENING

Fluorescent mountains sway to an eerie flute melody. On a cliff, Popo, 39, as a Nagual HAWK watches the spirit desert beside Koko, 9, as a hunched RABBIT next to a small green GECKO.

The rabbit stills its twitching nose. Below, multicolored coyotes fight, play, and mate.

KOKO
The talisman gives me new eyes. But why a rabbit? Why not a wolf--or your jaguar?

POPO
Your internal spirit chooses what is true. Quiet your thoughts. Watch with humility.

The landscape slows. Music fractures. Trees clutch the earth. Serpent-eagles shed wings and fall as snakes.

POPO (cont'd)
The medicine opens our spirit vision. But it is only a small glimpse of what is an infinite realm.

KOKO
I think I understand. We build our own little pieces of the Nagual through the spirit we use. Good spirits bring harmony and goodness. Evil spirits have nothing but endless frustration.

The rabbit shivers. The gecko flees. The hawk folds a wing around Koko.

POPO
You may move softly, my little rabbit, but you'll change the world like Quetzalcoatl, the feathered serpent.

The purple sun races. Black clouds descend. Dust devils scatter the animal spirits; one coyote vanishes in sparks.

POPO (cont'd)
Something approaches. We must go. Now!

The hawk flutters behind a rock pile. The rabbit dives after her as a gray dust devil tears past.

KOKO
What is it, Mama Popo?

POPO
Priests are dispensing bad drugs to slaves. Their poisoned spirits are leaking into the Nagual.

The hawk guides the struggling rabbit through the storm. The spirit colors melt into a Sonoran sunset.

EXT. SONORAN DESERT - CONTINUOUS

Long dark shadows stretch out from the mesquite trees and saguaro cactus. Popo and Koko turn back into their human forms. Popo jogs ahead of Koko, deftly dodging brush and cholla cactus. She stops in an open clearing as Koko catches up. They turn and see behind them in the distance, a line of shabbily dressed skeleton-like priests with torches herding a group of bound slaves on a forced march.

KOKO
Mama-Popo. I'm scared. Who is that?

POPO
They're evil priests. It's their religion to enslave people and use them for their selfish purposes.

KOKO
Why doesn't my grandfather do something?

POPO
That's a good question. I guess that's what my father does. He advises your grandfather and I know he doesn't like what the priests are trying to do. That's why I'm here. I supply my father with the right nagual medicines that gives him the spiritual power to protect your grandfather, restrain the priests and support the people's needs.

Popo spits angrily, turns around and holding Koko's hand tightly, walks calmly away.

INT. SPIDER LADY'S TAVERN - NIGHT

Two robed individuals, BASKING SHARK, 39, and MOAN CHOC, 22, share a table at the rear.

BASKING SHARK
Pay attention Moan Choc. I'm going to show you how to do business. It matters not where you are, all drug deals go down the same.

MOAN CHOC
Why is that?

BASKING SHARK
Haven't a clue. Drugs are drugs and it has it's own culture. Watch.

A young lady, SPIDER LADY ASSISTANT, 20, approaches.

SPIDER LADY ASSISTANT
Spider Lady will see you now. Please leave all your weapons here.

Basking Shark and Moan Choc look at each other and then untie their sword belts and lay them on the table. Spider Lady Assistant turns and walks to the rear door, where a big warrior looks them over carefully and then opens the door. It is dark inside. Spider Lady Assistant walks in.

SPIDER LADY O.C.
Come in my friends. I've been expecting you Basking Shark and Moan Choc. The gods tell me you are trustworthy.

Basking Shark and Moan Choc look at each other quizzically.

INT. SPIDER LADY'S BACK ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Basking Shark and Moan Choc enter a dim red chamber. A mural depicts an eight-legged spider embracing animal-headed gods. Two cushions wait beneath it.

SPIDER LADY O.C.
Please be seated. May I offer you some refreshing cacao beer?

BASKING SHARK
Ah. Sure. Beer would be nice.

Spider Lady Assistant returns with two frothy clay cups in the shape of a squatting crocodile god.

BASKING SHARK (cont'd)
This stuff is okay, right? I mean I don't want to meet any gods before we do our business.

SPIDER LADY materializes on a raised platform, her red-and-black costume spreading into countless insect limbs.

SPIDER LADY
And our business today is...?

BASKING SHARK
I won't lie to you. I'm a drug smuggler. I smuggle by sea-going canoes. I have new drugs at low prices. I heard you might be interested in such matters.

SPIDER LADY
I don't deal in drugs. I deal only with medicinal powders and healing methods. What kind of new drugs?

Basking Shark gives Moan Choc a smirk.

BASKING SHARK
My gracious lord, we have for sale exotic medicines from far off lands. It is well known you are the person procuring such things for the royalty.

SPIDER LADY
I simply dispense medical advice and sometimes provide medicines. What do you have and what diseases do they cure?

BASKING SHARK
They don't cure diseases so much as they improve performance.

He hands her a bundle of leaves.

BASKING SHARK (cont'd)
I can provide as much of this as you might require. In return, I'd like to buy any skin-walking drugs that come from the northern hinterlands.

SPIDER LADY
My web reaches Chachalacas. I know about your secret harbor and your smuggling operation. I can perhaps help--on my terms.

INT. TIKAL LORD'S PALACE - DAY

Nxmul, 31, sits on his raised throne platform surrounded by a few priests and Coltal, 29, dressed as a chief priest bearing new tattoos on face and arms.

NXMUL
That alien monster, Xlangl has the supreme lords head on as platter. He has convinced him and the nobility that the bastard grandson still lives. That fat queer seems to conveniently forget where his daughter and granddaughter live.

COLTAL
He'll soon learn of your power. They may have all roads out of Tikal blocked by manned fortifications, but we've found a way around.

NXMUL
Xlangl will find them. He sees all from his skin-walking magic.

COLTAL
I know the drugs that make Xlangl so powerful. I am collecting some now and soon will be able to confront him on his own ground.

NXMUL
And you'll look so lovely stretched out on top of the pyramid of the sun, feeding the gods with what's left of your black heart.

COLTAL
If my lord pleases, I humbly put forward a plan for your approval.

NXMUL
I'm listening.

COLTAL
We are smuggling our new slave drugs to the Five Nations. The Tlaloc priests are creating a whole new kind of slave, replacing the conventional lazy ones. It will disrupt the basis for Teotihuacan's existence.

NXMUL
But how does that put me on the royal throne?

COLTAL
I humbly suggest, we give our new drugs to all the noble clans of the Five Nations.
(MORE)

COLTAL (cont'd)
If they become addicted, think of the power it gives you.

NXMUL
I'm humbled by your evil genius.

FADE TO BLACK

FADE IN:

EXT. CLIFF DWELLERS PLAZA - DAY

POPO, 45, and KOKO, 15, follow a path carved into red sandstone. She carries a woven pack; he carries a melon. Around the bend, a cliff village rises above the river, its adobe homes linked by narrow stone paths.

POPO
Market day brings farmers, distant traders--and the flute maker.

KOKO
I hope he came. His flutes sound like birds.

They enter a market beneath tiered cliff dwellings. Stalls overflow with food, animals, and foreign goods. They find an open spot and Popo spreads a shawl and Koko places the watermelon on it.

POPO
I must meet a distant trader. Stay here, sell your melon, and take no drugs without me.

She turns to leave, looks back with concern.

POPO (cont'd)
Do not wander.

POPO (cont'd)
Be good. I will be back soon.

Popo leaves. Koko spreads his serape nearby, sits on it and plays his wooden flute softly.

EXT. CLIFF DWELLERS PLAZA - LATER

Three swaggering BOYS enter, harass some vendors, and steal tomatoes. Their leader, BIGGEST BOY, 16, spots Koko.

BIGGEST BOY
Hey! Who are you?

Koko stops playing the flute.

KOKO
Kokopelli, adopted son of Popomagipta of the Serpent Eagle clan. You?

BIGGEST BOY
(mockingly)
Koko Puke-Face of the Vulture clan.

The boys laugh. A tomato strikes Koko's face. Another boy kicks away his melon.

Koko jumps up, catches his loose loincloth underfoot, and accidentally bares himself.

KOKO
Give it back!

The market falls silent. Everyone stares.

The boys howl when Koko realizes what they see.

BIGGEST BOY
Freak. No one would claim you as human.

ALL BOYS
Freak! Freak!

Biggest Boy stomps the melon apart.

Popo returns with BEBE, 17, a powerful Mayan girl. Koko yanks up his loincloth. Bebe reads Popo's fury and sprints across the plaza and tackles Biggest Boy.

Bebe pins him and wrenches his arm behind his back.

BEBE
Apologize!

BIGGEST BOY
Ow! You're hurting me. Stop it.

At Popo's signal, Bebe releases him. Biggest Boy looks at Bebe and scrambles after his friends.

BEBE
Next time, pay for the melon!

Koko hides behind Popo. Bebe looks around at the stunned crowd with a big smile.

BEBE (cont'd)
(proudly)
Popomagipta is my new owner. I will kill or die for her.

Bebe glares and growls softly. Everyone finds work to do.

POPO
Slow down. We do not use violence without cause.

BEBE
Are you sure? I think I could take them. But I obey. Is this your son?

Popo gently draws Koko from behind her.

POPO
Kokopelli, meet Bebepuente--your new sister. She was enslaved. I brought her home to be free.

Bebe beams. Then gets serious.

BEBE
Free sounds complicated. I prefer being a slave, that way I always know what to do.
Also--has anyone told you how impressive you are?

Koko blushes and shakes his head no. Bebe looks him over carefully and taps on his hump.

BEBE (cont'd)
Where'd you get that? Never mind. I will be your older sister. I will take good care of you.

Bebe takes both their hands and marches them from the market.

EXT. POPO'S ADOBE HUT - NEXT DAY

Bebe wakes up before dawn, goes outside with an empty deerskin water bag and returns shortly pouring water into the big clay pot. Popo wakes up from the noise.

POPO
You don't have to do that.

BEBE
I don't see any other slaves around here.

Bebe goes to the built-in adobe fireplace in one corner and begins making a fire.

POPO
Well, as far as I am concerned, you're free.

Bebe turns staring at Popo with tears welling up in her eyes.

BEBE
I can't be free. I'd have no place to go. No place to call home. I'd be stolen by thieves and sold to priests for sacrifice. Please don't set me free!

POPO
It's okay, Bebe. You can stay. But I don't allow slavery. All the world's creatures must be free. You can be my daughter and have a home here as long as you wish.

She removes a clay tablet necklace from her neck and puts it on Bebe.

POPO (cont'd)
Wear this in remembrance of your mother, the one who loves you more than the sun loves the earth. This will identify you as a valued member of the Serpent Eagle clan.

Bebe looks at it, wipes away a few tears, and smiles brightly.

BEBE
I'll never take it off. Thank you mother!

She hugs Popo and goes back to work on the fire.

Koko wakes up and joins them.

KOKO
Good morning, mama-Popo. What's she doing?

POPO
If I'm not mistaken, she's fixing us breakfast.

INT. TIKAL LORD'S PALACE - DAY

COLTAL, 35, dressed in priestly black robes, vomits into a clay pot being held by a servant priest. NXMUL, 37, dressed as a king with giant headdress and multi-colored robes, sits on a raised throne and watches with impatience.

NXMUL
You call that magic? You said this drug was the secret behind Xlangl's skin-walking. All you've transformed into is a sick dog not even worth eating.

Coltal wipes his mouth with his robes, gasping for breath.

COLTAL
My Lord. I feel it's happening. It just takes more drugs and... concentration. Unfortunately I don't have a lot of drugs left to work with but I know where they come from.

NXMUL
Xlangl spies through the Nagual. We must be patient. But before the second Katun, we will march on Teotihuacan. I will lead with my queen Juju and Princess Xixi at my side. We must claim what is ours and eliminate any pretenders to the throne. We'll hunt down the witch who guards the boy and bring them both here for sacrifice.

COLTAL
If that heathen alien with his weird headdress can fly like an eagle then I can at least fly like the raven who drives the eagle mad.

NXMUL
You smell! Here, have some more cacao beer.

Coltal takes a big gulp, swishes it around in his mouth and spits it out.

COLTAL
I must travel to Teotihuacan as high priest where I know I can find the secret medicines I need.

NXMUL
While you're there, you must use your new Nagual powers to eliminate that monster wizard propping up the decrepit old fool.

COLTAL
I shall do my best, oh great lord, which will undoubtedly be the worst for him.

EXT. SONORAN DESERT - DAY

POPO, 46, carrying a basket on her arm, leads KOKO, 16, and BEBE, 18, on a collecting trip in the desert.

POPO
Look here under this mesquite tree next to the arroyo. Water flowed here recently and the mushroom living underground, blooms by pushing up flowers.

KOKO
Wow, that's a lot of flowers.

BEBE
I'll help. Which ones should we pick? All?

POPO
The long spindly ones are psilocybin. The red capped ones with white spots are amanita mascara. Don't forget to remove the white dots. They contain arsenic and can kill you if you don't remove them first.

BEBE
Mother Popo. You're so wise. I could make up songs about you.

BeBe hums to herself as she helps Koko collect the mushrooms. They move on and Popo leads them to a huge cholla cactus.

POPO
Don't ever touch this cactus. It will grab you and never let go until you cut it out.

BEBE
Oh my! An evil plant.

POPO
Be careful but look closer.

Popo points down at something. Bebe approaches cautiously and bends down to look in a hole exposed at the bottom of the bush. Growing inside is a patch of little barrel cacti with grayish buttons on top.

POPO (cont'd)
The most sacred cactus uses a larger more dangerous cactus as its guardian.

BEBE
Like a mother and her children.

Popo smiles and notices that Koko is listening raptly to everything Bebe says.

POPO
Use a tree branch to brush away any cholla on the ground and then carefully spread your serape, crawl in and cut the buttons on top of the biggest barrels.

Bebe carefully follows her instructions. She crawls on your stomach into the hole far enough to cut the buttons and hand them out. Koko holds up a handful to Popo.

KOKO
Wow! I'm getting high just looking at them.

INT. POPO'S ADOBE HUT - NIGHT

Popo prepares some dried mushrooms, slicing them and mixing with hot tea.

BEBE
So what kind of animal will I transform to?

Popo sits down opposite Koko and Bebe, hands them cups and they tentatively sip the hot tea.

POPO
You don't just turn into any old spirit. It must be an animal spirit-- a talisman.
First you must quiet your thoughts, feel yourself enter the Nagual, and then give yourself over to it. Let it guide you to your essence.

They hold hands and relax as reality changes to the spirit world. The room moves about, distorting and then fills with neon colors.

KOKO
I feel something new. It's colorful and floating.

Koko merges into a colorful blue macaw. Popo begins taking on the shape of a desert hawk.

BEBE
I feel it too!

Bebe changes into a translucent color-flashing hummingbird. She becomes small and flaps her wings fast causing a humming sound. She flies up unexpectedly and bumps into the ceiling.

KOKO
Squawk! Be careful!

Bebe ricochets around the room as hawk and macaw watch. Popo becomes human, catches the hummingbird, and draws Bebe back into herself--dizzy and laughing.

BEBE
Wow! That was great! Lets do it again?

Bebe vomits while holding her thumbs up.

INT. POPO'S ADOBE HUT - DAY

Bebe and Koko are working on the floor when Popo approaches hiding something behind her back.

POPO
I have a surprise for you Koko.

She pulls out a beautifully carved and decorated bird-bone flute. Koko jumps up and down with happiness and delight. He takes the flute and holds it high above his head.

KOKO
Oh my gosh! I love you! I love you!
Thank you!

He hugs Popo and Bebe as he dances around them.

EXT. NEAR POPO'S ADOBE HUT - EVENING

Koko plays his new flute beside an open fire. Popo and Bebe weave baskets nearby. One by one, villagers emerge from the darkenss to listen.

BEBE
See? Everybody likes music.

Soon the crowd grows to dozens. When Koko finishes, they clap and make noise, shouting for more. He nods to Bebe and begins playing another song. This time Bebe steps forward in the light from the fire.

BEBE (cont'd)
(singing)
Let none be sad or ponder the world.
Behold our flowers and songs.
Find joy in them, dear friends.
They soothe bitter sorrow.

They finish the song and the crowd is silent. Popo dabs at her eyes.

INT. POPO'S ADOBE HUT -- LATER

POPO
That song was so beautiful.

KOKO
Bebe taught me the melody. I added the swallow's answer. It is about finding joy in a hard world.

BEBE
I learned many songs so I could sing my master's children to sleep every night. I have songs for every kind of happiness.

KOKO
What about love between a warrior and a maiden? Sex.
I know what animals do. Humans too.
It still seems... messy.

BEBE
Mama Popo, does love between a man and woman cause happiness?

Popo laughs.

POPO
Sit down you two. I guess it is time for the talk.

They squat in front of her paying close attention.

POPO (cont'd)
Love begins with the bond between parent and child, then the family that protects them. Sex is not love. Sex is a desire, like eating or breathing. Sex desire is powerful, but it is only one kind of love.

BEBE
Koko and I love each other. Should we explore desire?

Popo studies them. They wait, serious.

POPO
That choice belongs to both of you-- together. Desire through sex creates pleasure. Pleasure creates life, so treat it with joy, honesty, and above all, care. Be responsible and only make life when really prepared for such things.

Koko turns to Bebe, triumphant.

KOKO
I told you she would say yes.

BEBE
She didn't say yes. She said we both have to agree. I'm not sure a scrawny little weasel like you is worth having sex with. You'll probably just take one look at my perfect body and blow your wad.

KOKO
And you're a fat old turkey, probably can't even find the hole with all that gorgeous skin hanging down.

Koko pinches Bebe and she tickles him back. They tumble together, laughing.

Popo shakes her head, smiling despite herself, and returns to work.

INT. THRONE ROOM SUPREME LORDS PALACE - DAY

ARAX, 46, reclines on a pillowed dais while young attendants fan and groom him. XLANGL, 65, sits below. He is holding a small wooden boat resembling a child's toy.

XLANGL
Years of blockade, yet Tikal grows richer. Something still feeds it.

ARAX
Venus favors them. My daughter and entire royal line are gone! Tikal may inherit my throne!

Arax cries like a baby.

XLANGL
Stop. You're getting too old for this. They have won nothing yet. Juju lives as a revered captive queen. She will return some day. Maybe soon if we can pry them out of hiding.

Arax stops blubbering.

ARAX
You think so?

XLANGL
Her illegitimate daughter is technically your granddaughter and is as valid an heir as her illegitimate son, Kokopelli. Her name is Xixichupaka, and has already been declared a god by Tikal's priests.

ARAX
That's not our religion. She's abandoned her heritage for the dirty irreverent Mayans.

Arax mockingly spits sideways.

XLANGL
They have little power among the five nations and we have the true heir in hiding. They are boxed in and can't do much except complain. But more troubling, our priests, who once required sacrificial slaves in small numbers, are now showing up with much larger numbers. They farm out the excess as agricultural slaves. Nobel owned farms using them has doubled production, driving down market prices. Free farmers who can't compete lose their land and their livelihood. Slave owning nobles grow richer and less concerned with the condition of the people.

ARAX
My cousins have had a lot more money lately to gamble with. I've even won some of it.

Arax brightens.

XLANGL
The displaced farmers flood our city as homeless wretches and beggars, waiting to die.

ARAX
I know. My sister keeps reminding me of my responsibilities.

XLANGL
I have recently obtained information that a new smuggled drug from across the ocean keeps the Priest slaves working longer on less food, with fewer guards.

Xlangl crosses to a relief map of the Five Nations.

XLANGL (cont'd)
We sealed the land routes. Only the sea remains--but ordinary canoes cannot carry this much volume.

ARAX
Is there a hole in our border?

Xlangl traces Mixtecs's eastern coast around the gulf to where it joins Maya. Then he draws it straight back across the gulf.

XLANGL
Maya traders may have learned to cross open water with large cargoes.

Arax examines Xlangl's small twin-hulled wooden model.

XLANGL (cont'd)
Spider Lady controls the drug trade. She will know.

ARAX
I could have her tortured. It would be my honor.

Xlangl laughs.

XLANGL
I don't think she would let you do that. I'll talk to her. We are old friends.

EXT. SONORAN DESERT - DAY

Bebe and Koko are walking through the desert searching the ground.

BEBE
There's been no rain. I don't see any mushrooms.

KOKO
Keep looking. Popo's supply is running low and she's counting on us to find more.

BEBE
Here's another peyote cactus.

Bebe gets on her knees and carefully trims two buttons off the top of the cactus cluster. She stands up but can't see Koko.

KOKO O.C.
I'm over here. I found an arroyo with mud in the bottom.

Bebe walks a short distance and looks down into the arroyo.

BEBE
Did you find mushrooms?

KOKO
Oh boy, did I. Take a look!

He stands up revealing a bunch of mushrooms growing out of an old log partially submerged in mud.

BEBE
Mama's going to love that.

EXT. SONORAN DESERT - LATER THAT NIGHT

Koko plays beside a fire. Behind him, a cliff face bristles with ancient pictographs. Bebe climbs halfway up and pecks a new image with a pointed flint.

KOKO
(singing a cappella)
Far away, I'd rather fly away,
Like a bird that's here and gone.
A man gets tied to earth and clay,
He gives the world its saddest song,
Its saddest song.

He plays a melody on his flute and Bebe pecks away at the cliff rock keeping the rhythm of the song and humming along. The image looks like Kokopelli.

BEBE
Do you ever wonder what its like to be a royal person? Someone everyone looks up to and is liked automatically.

KOKO
Why do you ask that? I don't know the first thing about royalty. Don't care anyway.

BEBE
But you're the grandson of the Supreme Lord of Mixtec. You could live in a palace. Eat sugar cane all day and drink cacao all night.

KOKO
Haven't you noticed my little friend I carry around on my back? I could never be royalty. I'm not perfect enough. Besides, I hate destinies. I'll stay right here, gather herbs and medicines like Popo and play my flute and eat beans.

BEBE
Maybe that's your destiny. Play music and make people happy.
(MORE)

BEBE (cont'd)
You don't have to go back to where you came from and prove anything.

KOKO
I know. Popo said it's better to have the freedom of fate than the certainty of destiny. Don't you agree?

BEBE
What would I know? Slaves don't have destinies, just duties. You play music and my duty is to help you. Chipping on the rocks is just a way to relax and calm my mind. I feel like I'm making a difference in the world that will last.

KOKO
You think I look like that?

INT. DRUG TAVERN FRONT ROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

Dim light reveals patrons smoking and drinking. Two OLD WARRIORS confer over pulque served in monstrous clay cups.

OLD WARRIOR #1
If I don't find a new client soon, I won't have a feather to buy tortillas let alone another flask.

OLD WARRIOR #2
Those damned priests are all taking our jobs. They use drugs instead of old fashioned fear to control their slaves. Where does that leave us?

OLD WARRIOR #1
The damned nobles still make their profits. They don't care who keeps their asses safe anymore. We need to make Teotihuacan great again!

Hooded, Xlangl enters and passes two guards at the rear. A coded scratch opens the back-room door.

OLD WARRIOR #2
See. There goes one now. He disguises himself as a peasant but walks with the haughtiness of a noble. I wager he has more wealth than he could possibly use while we starve.

A black priest sitting in a corner, sees Xlangl, gets up and leaves in a hurry.

OLD WARRIOR #1
I wonder why a lord like that has to visit a place like this? Why doesn't he send a slave for his needs, like everyone else?

OLD WARRIOR #2
He did look like he was carrying something. I think we should stick around. I feel the gods might be throwing some fortune our way.

INT. DRUG TAVERN BACK ROOM - NIGHT

SPIDER LADY, 65, lounges beneath a riot of feathered tapestries, smoking a demon-shaped pipe. Xlangl kneels opposite her.

SPIDER LADY
Why does the great regent to our supreme lord creep through my tavern like a thief? I thought you flew with eagles.

She gestures for him to take the pipe. He takes it and reclines on some nearby pillows.

XLANGL
Tonight I come as a humble petitioner.

He draws from the pipe and exhales.

XLANGL (cont'd)
The patient spider feels every tremor in her web. I have need of your skills. To honor you, I have brought a small gift.

He gives her a gold-and-turquoise brooch: the two forms of Quetzalcoatl entwined.

SPIDER LADY
The two Quetzalcoatl's at war. Some people think it is the same god, just in two different moods.

She holds it up to her breast admiring it.

SPIDER LADY (cont'd)
What must I do to earn this honor?

Her smile supplies several suggestions. He ignores her and takes another puff on the pipe.

XLANGL
Tlaloc's priests drug captives, making them addicted to work and hire them out as cheap labor. What is the drug, and how does it reach them?

SPIDER LADY
Profiting in medicine requires strange bedfellows. I have a hard-earned reputation for being discrete.

XLANGL
These are foreign priests you despise. Why help them now?

SPIDER LADY
Keep your friends close and your enemies profitable. Now I ask the questions.

SPIDER LADY (cont'd)
Why do Tlaloc priests visit Chachalacas every full moon?

XLANGL
I don't know. Ask me more.

SPIDER LADY
You know they come by sea. Ask why the docks at Chachalacas have been extended to berth many oceangoing canoes.

XLANGL
It sounds like I should visit the Lord's coastal palace. Care to join me for some sea and sun?

SPIDER LADY
Sun ruins my complexion. But your Nagual medicines arrived from the hinterlands. You're welcome to take them with you.

They kiss lightly like old friends.

EXT. STREETS OF TEOTIHUACAN - NIGHT - LATER

Hooded and carrying a woven bag, Xlangl moves through a narrow moonlit street. Armed black-robed priests turn into his path, Coltal at their head. Xlangl palms a shriveled mushroom.

COLTAL
Stop! You there! What are you doing?

Xlangl pops it in his mouth and chews, turns, and reveals his face.

XLANGL
You talking to me?

COLTAL
Grab him! He's the heretic alien.

Xlangl runs. A spear flies--and he becomes an obsidian feathered JAGUAR, vaulting over it. The cat tears through the priests in a blur of claws and slashing obsidian. Coltal backs away, chewing a dark pellet. The jaguar finishes off the priests and begins advancing on
Coltal. Coltal becomes a huge BLACK RAVEN and barely flies out of reach as the jaguar lunges at him. He flies up landing on a nearby roof. The jaguar prowls in a circle, sits and Xlangl returns to human form. He scans the roof tops for sign of the attacker. He picks up his fallen bag.

A spear punches through his back. OLD WARRIOR #1 holds the shaft.

OLD WARRIOR #1
Forgive me, my lord. I need what is in that bag more than you do.

Xlangl collapses. The old warrior grabs the bag and darts around a corner--straight into Coltal. He freezes. Coltal grabs the stolen spear and jabs it into his throat, grabbing the bag as he collapses.

COLTAL
Thank you for your service.

INT. POPO'S ADOBE HUT - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Popo is alone working at her table when she goes rigid. She cries out in pain.

POPO
E-i-i-o-o-h! What's wrong!? Father!

She closes her eyes tightly in a grimace of pain.

INT. BEDROOM SUPREME LORD'S PALACE - NIGHT - LATER

XLANGL lies in state, the Supreme Lord and his household gather around him. Servants cover his eyes with gold discs, place jade in his mouth, paint him with red ocher, and wrap him in red-and-white feathered blanket.

ARAX
(weeping)
My old master! You couldn't have picked a worse time for your trip to the underworld. I don't know what I'm going to do!

Arax crys out loud. His attendants join him. Outside, a raven SCREAMS.

FADE OUT: