



Chapter 10: Warrior Queen of the Wasp Star, Xux Ek

9.11.14.12.7 8 Manik' 0 Sip

Yol Tan

By the time Jade Moon 1 Rabbit seats her second tuun, I decide to facilitate the king's death. Once again, Star Flower is my only option for help. With carefully chosen words, I ask her for a potent brew that eases pain and brings about peaceful sleep. "It's for my own needs," I say. "I'm experiencing restless nights without sleep."

Star Flower gladly helps me, as I knew she would. She strives to be in my good graces so she can enjoy advantages over other courtiers in the servants' quarters.

On a night the full moon turns blood red, I arrive at the king's bedroom doors. My visit is unusual but the guard allows me to enter because I am the queen and I tell him my moon is full because of the Blood Moon.

The king is lying on his bed platform restlessly attempting to sleep. When he sees me, he questions why I am in his room. "I want no more daughters from you, sister of Pakal!"

"I bring you a brew for your ailments, Lord Husband," I say as I help him sit up and then offer him a ceramic vessel with a brew of pulque mixed with potent medicines and extra honey to hide the bitter taste. The king's nightly balche has already left him intoxicated and his behavior is unusually passive. Perhaps because we are not in my bed chamber and his attendants aren't around, he isn't lashing out at me. Or maybe my appearance confounds him. In any event, he accepts my brew and I help him hold the cup as he drinks. He then lies on his bed and makes a quick, exasperated snort like a peccary's last gasp after the killing arrow enters its heart.

I stand at the platform and whisper near my husband's grizzled head, "I call upon the Lords of Death, Gathered Blood, father of Blood Moon, One Scab, Flying Puss, Disease and Decay. Great K'awiil, take Hummingbird Sun on the dark journey that never returns. Lock him in the house of bats in the dungeons of Xibalba. Hurl at him flint blades of fire that cause him never-ending agony for the death he has cast upon my beloved." I then gather up the vessel, wipe my husband's drooling mouth and return to my chamber.

At daybreak, a trusted kuleboob informs me that attendants found the Great Hummingbird Sun struggling for one last breath. Although I paid an unexpected visit to his chamber the night before, his lords do not suspect me of casting harm upon the king because he was sickly and old. They believe his union with me caused his heart to erupt and they do not blame me for that. I feel no remorse or any need for atonement. I merely nudged the feeble king

into the inevitable. And there were no witnesses to my cursing the decrepit old man or my offering him a special brew.

I immediately send word to Pakal that the king has passed and implore my brother to restore the broken alliance between Abundant Waters and Bone Dog. I plead for his support as I aim to sever the Kaan strangle-hold on my adopted city. Most of Bone Dog's elite lords and generals swear their allegiance to me as co-regent and ruling queen until the b'aah ch'ok comes of age. A few of the king's closest advisors flee the city and join the Kaan in their snake capital far north of Yax Mutul.

Before rumors sway my citizens against me, I hold a public rally at the bottom of the palace hill in front of the central plaza. To portray myself as the moon goddess and a powerful new ruler for my citizens, I wear a belt that dangles spondylus shells with glyphs of Chac Xib Chaac, and a netting of jade beads over a knee-length huipil. My headdress of paper bark has the glyphs of my patron goddess Blood Moon.

While I am speaking to my citizens, my daughter is beside me with her nurse but Tul Til is nowhere in sight. I do not trust the heart of the crown prince, especially now that he has seated eight stones. His manners toward me are unpredictable. And I do not want to alarm my citizens with his bad behavior while reassuring them that I'm their ruling queen. People are not aware of the rift between their late king and me. They do not know that the b'aah ch'ok and his mother haven't bonded in kinship. Citizens only understand that they must now look to me for guidance. They believe that my bloodline powers will assure Bone Dog of its prosperity and that when my son is of age, he will take the mat of accession. But secretly, I'm hoping that day will never happen.

Before my gathered citizens I uphold the staff of K'awiil and announce the king's passing. "Priest healers have declared the king entered the road as a natural course of his age. He had been ailing for many years and now he suffers no more." Rumbles of concern wave through the crowd and I must quickly appease their fears. "The king is gone but our city won't fall into destruction. You won't starve and die from disease and petulance," I announce. "I will conjure the power of the Jaguar lineage and that of my mother Lady Rigel, Star of Creation, descendant of your first king Foliated Fire Cloud."

The citizens cheer for my bloodlines and call on me to lead them in a renewal of bountiful harvests and victories.

Yol Tan takes the Regnal Name Jaguar Blood Moon

12 Ik' 15 Yax K'in

Jaguar Blood Moon

When the next Fang Moon appears with Venus as the morning star, I ascend to the throne at a public ceremony before the steps leading up to my palace. A sacred fire burns beside a newly erected stela that marks my birth, my arrival in Bone Dog, and my ascension to the jaguar throne today 12 Ik' 15 Yax K'in. The stela notes that my precious daughter is present at the seating of this event but deliberately omits the name of my son.

On a platform beside the steps, I'm sitting cross-legged before my bloodletting vessel. To prepare for the Venus blood sacrifice to the gods and to my bloodline, I've purified myself in a sweat bath and have drunken a hallucinogenic brew. Jade Moon sits on the platform with a nurse and her brother Tul Til. By my request, Star Flower has given my son a special brew before the event and he now sits passively. I did not want him at the ceremony because of his disruptive behavior but the citizens call for his presence and I must assure them that I'm keeping their

world in order. For them, Tul Til is their future king in the direct patrilineage of Foliated Fire Cloud.

A priest hands me a lighted cigar laced with medicines that numb my sense of touch but increase my powers of perception. I pierce my tongue with a sting ray spine and pass a cord wrought with thorns through the hole. The pain is practically undetectable, like a subtle bite from a royal stingless bee. My blood drips onto bark paper in the stone bowl. The glyphs on the blood-stained paper say *Chac Xib Chaac, god who upholds the rising sun and paints the sky blood red.* I light the paper and priests blow conch shells, chant, and throw copal and chicle sap onto the sacred fire. As the smoke rises, I call, “Lady Rigel, my mother, great-great-granddaughter of the first king of Bone Dog. By the powers of K’awiil, appear before me in my butz chan vision.”

From the of vapors of fire, heavy plumes of smoke surround me and become my umbilical cord to Heaven. Ek’ way-nal opens and the gray smoke spews forth a hazy snake vision that fades in and out as it opens its maw. The face of a queen wearing the warrior headdress of Tlaloc Chaac Ek appears. But I know she is not my mother. Instead, Pakal’s mother Sak K’uk materializes like a misty apparition in a pirate mirror. I recognize her from stone etchings at the Red Palace in Abundant Waters.

Her words hum and clatter unintelligibly like swarming wasps or howler monkeys at the break of dawn. “What words do you speak? Mother of my brother. *Kaloomte Lakamha Ajaw Ix,*” I ask the countenance in my snake vision. “I have called upon my bloodline, my mother, Lady Rigel? Why do you appear before me?”

“*I am your ancestor,*” the voice becomes clear.

“You are first wife to my father Precious Jaguar Macaw,” I say. “You are a great queen, like your mother Lady Yohl. Like Une Balam the Lady of Yax Mutul. But you are not my

mother. Lady Rigel of Bone Dog, second wife to your husband, is the vision I seek through the hazy portal of Ek' way-nal."

"I am your granddam," the voice declares. I clasp my head to focus on the vision through the portal to the world beyond. Jade Moon 1 Rabbit stirs on the platform, aware of my agitation.

The voice continues, *"Your father is not my husband Precious Jaguar Macaw. Your sire is my son King Pakal. Lover to your mother Lady Rigel who serves my husband in the world beyond the rainbow road."*

I hold my head tighter because it's pounding from what I'm hearing. "What words do you offer me mother of the Jaguar kingdom? I fail to understand."

"Heed what I tell you, queen of Bone Dog, daughter of my lineage tree. The demons of Xibalba possess the soul of Hummingbird Sun. The seed of your harvest Tul Til contains tainted blood from your husband. Your son is a rapacious caiman who will manifest your demise. The daughter of your harvest will carry forth the bloodline of Lady Rigel and the lineage of your true father, my son. Jade Moon 1 Rabbit is guardian of your Maya Tree, Ya koknam wa te. Take the name of your father's dynasty and your patron goddess. Jaguar Blood Moon, I place the Tlaloc Chaac Ek crown of shells and feathers upon your head and give you the atl atl to wage war against the snake king Yuknoom. The legitimate king of Yax Mutul currently resides under the foot of Yuknoom. Together with my son, your father of the Jaguar kingdom, you will battle Kaan vassals and sacrifice Kaan leaders to K'awiil. Because of you, my granddaughter, King Nuun will scatter Kaan blooddrops and restore Yax Mutul to its former greatness and glory."

I inhale my cigar and blow smoke onto the vision. Then I ask the Great Sak K'uk, "How can I honor my father Pakal now that I know my true bloodline?"

“In two solar cycles you must lead an entrada of warriors to Yax Mutul. On the date 9 baktun 11 katun 16 tun 15 uinal 2 k’in, you will mark the Venus transit from atop the pyramid of the founding father of Yax Mutul. Your blood sacrifice will conjure powerful visions and you will know how to proceed.”

The priests beside the platform begin beating turtle shell drums. The flame of my bloodletting bowl intensifies and the vision dissipates in plumes of smoke until it is no more.

I drink from my water cup. My attendant wipes my brow. I stand, face my citizens, and declare, “Kaloomte Yuknoom corrupted your king with the promise of power. My husband broke from the shield of King Pakal. But fear not citizens. The Great Queen Mother of Pakal has revealed my regnal name as Jaguar Blood Moon. I take the power of K’awiil and invoke Chac Xib Chaac to make possible the harvest until the end of time.”

The citizens cheer in waves of fervor. I gesture for their silence. “We now take allegiance with Abundant Waters and Yax Mutul. Until my son can reign by the power of K’awiil, I take up the warrior helmet of Tlaloc Chaac Ek. Your queen will rid our kingdom of Kaan snakes. Citizens. Be not afraid. Listen to the highest voice of K’awiil. To your Holy Queen Jaguar Blood Moon. Be kind to one another but battle injustice without mercy and I promise you victory.”

The crowd shouts, “Jaguar Blood Moon! *K’uh Ajaw Ix*. The queen’s bloodline is strong and mighty. She is a wise woman with the heart of a fearless man.”

Xux Ek, Wasp Star Warriors of Jaguar Blood Moon

When I become ruling queen, Bone Dog has very few warriors of its own. Until he switched alliance to the Kaan, my husband had relied on Pakal’s warriors. Then he relied on Kaan warriors. After Hummingbird Sun entered the dark road, all the Kaan warriors left Bone Dog to rejoin Yuknoom and his allies. But rumors quickly spread that they would return with

reinforcements, with Yuknoom himself, and destroy the gods of my adopted city. To remedy this, I summon men throughout the world to join my entrada to Yax Mutul and to wage war against the Kaan. Over the next two lunar cycles, young men arrive from all directions, although most come from the cities allied with the Jaguar kingdom, including Ux Witik, Edzna, Coba, and Stone Mountain City Where All Gods Unite.

During the third lunar cycle past my ascension, Kan Xul arrives in Bone Dog with two thousand Scar Dog warriors from my father King Pakal. Nearly five tuuns have passed since Kan Xul returned to his father in shameful defeat and Hummingbird Sun ordered my beloved Yax K'uh beheaded. Pakal has sent his second son to help me train my troops before the entrada that may last as long as two solar cycles. While I am away, Kan Xul and 1000 troops will remain in Bone Dog to protect Pakal's southern trade interests and keep order in his re-claimed vassal city.

In the receiving hall I welcome Kan Xul and we discuss strategies for my upcoming mission. He wears leather sandals with straps to his knees, a loin cloth and apron made of royal weave, and jade anklets, bracelets, and ear and nose plugs. His bare chest displays the pectoral insignia of a Jaguar prince and his hair braids hold quetzal feathers and pink shells.

In my jade net dress and jewelry, I am sitting on my jaguar throne. My daughter sits beside me as she almost always does. Tul Til and Star Flower are feeding the macaws at the far corner of the hall. Because they are beyond earshot, and the birds are loudly squawking, I admit to Kan Xul that I do not trust my son's judgments, heart, nor his intentions. "The heir apparent needs to vastly mature before he takes the mat or he will rule as a tyrant like his father. The b'aah ch'ok of Bone Dog is a selfish boy. He insults me and disrespects his sister. While I'm away, I won't miss him but I'll spend every night crying for my daughter. I would bring her on the entrada if it weren't so fraught with danger. I have arranged for my healer Ol Nitt to care for

Jade Moon. My servant Star Flower believes she should care for my daughter but I do not trust her. As a compromise and to keep her spirit of jealousy tame, I told my life-servant to care for the b'aah ch'ok as his personal healer. Now I am asking you, Second Son, please keep the crown prince occupied and away from my daughter while I'm gone."

"I vow by my life to keep Jade Moon safe," Kan Xul reassures me. "And I won't allow the b'aah ch'ok to behave inappropriately. I'll teach him the manners of a king."

I smile, feeling much affection for Kan Xul, the eternal best friend of my beloved Yax K'uh. "One day you'll be a great king of the Jaguar dynasty," I tell him.

"This is my life's aspiration and what my father has trained me for but I'm second in line and my father is thriving in his old age. Still, we can dream and have visions of possibilities. Can't we?"

I look at my daughter beside me. She is happily playing with dolls made from corn husks. Jade Moon 1 Rabbit always warms my heart. "Your granddam Sak K'uk manifested in the butz chan of my accession," I tell Kan Xul. "She conveyed that Holy King Pakal is my father. You are my brother, Lord Second Son."

Kan Xul smiles with eyes that take on the sunlight entering the hall from the open balcony. "I'm overjoyed to call you sister," he replies. "I have loved you as a sister since we were children. I adore you as much as I loved Yax K'uh. Many times he told me about his love for you and now I believe your daughter is his seed of harvest. She has his complexion and face."

"I grew up honored to be the younger sister of King Pakal. But I'm even more privileged and empowered to be his daughter. After I arrive in Yax Mutul and defeat the Kaan, I want to announce my true lineage. Do you believe our father will allow this? I have not told my citizens

that I am the daughter of Pakal. Something held me back from revealing this revelation. Do you think I made the right decisions?"

"Dear sister queen," Kan Xul says, "On more than one occasion our father has confessed to me that you are the seed of his harvest. It is a secret he kept from his father. But many years have passed since Precious Jaguar Macaw entered the rainbow road and I know our father himself will proclaim you as his true child who possesses his mother's bloodline and the bloodline of Lady Rigel. But I advise you to keep this secret until after you return to Bone Dog. You do not want to draw out new enemies during your journey to the Venus transit."

Kan Xul's pectorals jingle as he reaches over and touches the shoulder of Jade Moon 1 Rabbit. "Are you prepared to become the next warrior queen?" he asks my little princess.

Breaking away from her dolls, Jade Moon politely replies, "When I seat my eighth stone, I will keep royal bees like my mother once did at Cloud Center."

"My daughter has a brave heart," I boast. "She's inquisitive, intelligent, and kind to her attendants and to animals. She has the burgeoning essence of a great leader and possesses no malignant spirit. My greatest hope is that one day she will take the mat of Bone Dog and break the patriline of my son and his father Hummingbird Sun."

Kan Xul laughs and gestures at his attendants standing across the room. They approach and place upon the platform a large palm-leaf basket. Second Son reaches inside and pulls out a jaguar cub that he hands to my daughter. "My batabs found her in a forest lair," he says. "After they killed the mother. This baby jaguar is my gift to you, Jade Moon 1 Rabbit. Une balam will bring you the power of baby K'awiil and one day you too, will become a queen in the lineage of two great dynasties."

My precious daughter cuddles the baby jaguar and smells its fur incensed with vanilla ointment. She promises her uncle to fulfill his wonderful prophesy.

During the wet season before the entrada departs, my warriors practice hand-to-hand combat in the ballcourt of Bone Dog through rain and sweltering heat. They are barefoot and wear only loincloths with skirt tails. Their bodies bear scars and tattoos of their clans and the dates of special events. Each man wears a stingray spine or peccary bone through his nostrils and has feathers and leaves lodged in his long, muddied hair.

Every day Second Son and I stand together at the northern platform and give commands to prepare my troops for battle. To show my powers of the moon and K'awiil, I am always wearing my netted jade dress and the royal belt with glyphs of my patron goddess and Red Chac Xib Chaac of the Eastern Sunrise. My jade ankle cuffs bear glyphs of day and night spirits. A shield at my back has the crescent fang moon.

On the first day of their training, I stand before my troops and orate, "Together with your gods you will battle to defeat the Sun Bellied Jaguar of the Kaan snake Yuknoom. You are pitzl players against the Lords of Death, mightier than the warrior wasp. You possess the power of your discipline and bravery. The Kaan threat is ever-present. King Nuun sits on the throne of Yax Mutul but Yuknoom has besieged his kingdom. With your might, we will clear away the snakes and restore Yax Mutul to its former glory!"

The warriors cheer and make war cries. They vow their lives to me, their warrior queen. "*K'uh Ajaw Ix* is the Moon Goddess prepared to wage war," they yell. "Our queen shows no fear and will lead us to victory against the Kaan."

One morning, near the end of our training, Kan Xul and I are walking among the practicing troops and discussing whom to appoint as my nacom, lieutenant batabs, and elite soldiers.

“To determine leaders among your warriors,” Second Son tells me, “You must put them through a trial. A warrior must prove his worth by fighting against the jungle beasts without weapons or by swimming through the cataracts of the Usumacinta.” Second Son pauses in his steps and looks directly at me. He places his hands on my shoulders and continues, “To command your troops you must select men who will serve you to their deaths and put loyalty above all fears. Such men you can rely on. You must devise such a test for bravery, endurance, and wit.”

I take to heart Kan Xul counsel because I feel a strong kinship with him now that he is firmly my brother and not my nephew. That night, I dream of ways to show bravery and when I wake in the early morning, I know my bravery test will involve warrior wasps. Because it’s the onset of the dry season, the wasps are beginning to swarm in the forest in preparation for new colonies. These swarms present the perfect opportunity for my warriors to demonstrate courage, wit, and stamina. When I tell Second Son about my idea, he proclaims that the Death Lords of Xibalba couldn’t have fashioned a better bravery trial.

That day, I stand on the ballcourt platform before my men wearing a shell headdress that carries the emblem of Xux Ek, the wasp goddess Venus as the evening star. Kan Xul stands beside me as I orate to my troops, “We shall adopt as our battle patron Xux Ek. The wasp goddess will guide you, protect you, and fill you with her itz k’uh, her holy essence and spirit. In battle we will carry her emblem and effigy along with the White Bone Centipede of King Pakal and the Baby Jaguar of Yax Mutul.”

The men cheer and begin chanting the name *Xux Ek*.

“In a dream,” I continue, “Xux Ek revealed to me a bravery trial that involves the forest warrior wasps. Their sting inflicts pain only the bravest of men can endure.”

The warriors cheer and shout. Every man wants to undergo the trial.

“I will be the first to endure this test,” I say and the voices of my men become still. “I expect my bravest warriors to follow my lead.”

The Warrior Wasp Bravery Test

The very next day Second Son and I lead a thousand men into the forest. Wearing sandals, ear spools of bone, loincloths, and yucca cloth jackets, the troops spread through the undergrowth of ferns, saplings, and liana vines in search of swarming warrior wasps on low branches and logs. With Kan Xul, my priests, and stewards, I also search the forest for these swarms. I’m wearing a blue huipil to my knees with a red waist sash and a headdress of macaw feathers. A string of beads at my calf dangles a jade emblem of Chac Xib Chaac. Everyone has painted his face with red and black symbols, including Kan Xul and myself.

In very little time one of my warriors loudly whistles and we gather around a low ceiba branch where a swarm of warrior wasps are clustering together in a colony the size of a man’s torso and the color of obsidian blue. My troops stand thirty paces from the swarm to avoid the hovering scout wasps. Without warning, a perimeter wasp can alert the entire swarm to attack and sting a man to his death no matter how brave he may be.

An attending priest hands me a lit cigar laced with white flowers that brings about sleep. I puff and billow out blooms of its vapor as I slowly walk toward the breathing, beating colony. The droning of the swarm and the pounding of my heart intensify with each step I take but my presence doesn’t alarm the wasp scouts because of the tranquilizing smoke.

As I approach the colony, my mind is unwavering. I recall something Yax K'uh once said at the Cloud Center Apiary. *I am sustainer of those who sustain me and I do not fear the bites of bats nor the stings of wasps. A warrior is unafraid of injury or death. Fear destroys strength and wisdom.*

I stop before the branch that bends from the weight of the swarm. Wasps are hovering close to the mass that loudly hums, crackles, and murmurs. While I keep puffing clouds of smoke onto the cluster that smells of decay, menstrual blood, and smelted copper, I carefully and slowly insert my small tattooed hand inside the throbbing mass; it seems like each wasp is moving aside for my hand.

For a moment my unmoving hand feels the heat of their pulsating energy. I then carefully pull back my hand and step away without suffering a single sting. I have passed my own trial and feel as brave and determined as I had nearly ten tuuns before at Lake Turtle Macaw when I passed the Purity Test that my husband had forced upon me.

Over the next few kins my warriors and I continue to search for new swarms and many brave men endure the trial. Those who remain unblemished, I promote to nacom generals or batab lieutenants. And those inflicted with wasp stings show no signs of suffering pain. The welts they develop are badges of honor, the wounds of a Scar Dog and Xux Ek warrior.