

(We can hear muffled voices behind a large stone slab. The PROFESSOR, in his late forties, early fifties, speaks with a British accent. MANNY, a local guide, is in his late twenties and he speaks with a slight Mexican accent that may be unnoticeable.)

PROFESSOR: Come on now, put your back into it, Manny.

MANNY: I could use some help, Professor.

PROFESSOR: Nonsense! You've got it. Besides, what am I paying you for?

MANNY: (labored) You paid for a jungle guide.

(MANNY grunts as he pushes with all his strength. Finally, as stone scrapes against stone, the stone slab gives way. We can hear the two more clearly and, as they enter the space, there is a slight echo to their voices. MANNY clicks on a flashlight.)

PROFESSOR: (in awe)I— I can't believe it. This is remarkable.

MANNY: (panting, sarcastic)No, no. You're welcome. It was my pleasure.

PROFESSOR: Do you realize what this is?

(As they step into the room, we hear the creaking of wood as they step onto the wooden floor in front of them.)

MANNY: No, but I'm sure you're about to—

PROFESSOR: If I'm correct, and I believe I am...

(The wooden structure creaks as the PROFESSOR walks about the room, his footsteps echoing throughout the chamber.)

PROFESSOR: The floor of the structure seems to be made of sapodilla wood.

MANNY: You've got quite the eye, Professor.

PROFESSOR: This much sapodilla places the construction of this structure some time before the switch to inkwood. This must have been built prior to the Late Classic Period.

MANNY: Meaning?

PROFESSOR: Meaning, this structure is likely...oh, Manny.

MANNY: Come on, best guess.

PROFESSOR: This part of the temple could be between 14 or 1800 years old. God, it looks remarkably well preserved. Perhaps the stone slab acted as a pressure seal...Ah! Wait! (beat) This structure is being held up by a series of wooden pulleys and, I think if I just pull on this rope here—

MANNY: Whoa, whoa, wait, don't—

(Not listening, the PROFESSOR unties a single rope and the entire wooden structure suddenly shifts as the rope disappears into the void above them. The structure comes loose and begins to lower into the ground, the wood groaning from the effort.)

PROFESSOR: Now do you understand, Manny? We're in an elevator. An ancient. Mayan. Elevator.

MANNY: You can't be serious.

PROFESSOR: Oh, I am. And given that stone slab we just moved—

MANNY: We?

PROFESSOR: No one has set foot on this elevator for over a millennia.

MANNY: A millennia? Is this...safe?

PROFESSOR: It's hard to say, but when has progress ever been made without taking a few risks.

(The wooden structure groans as it continues its descent.)

PROFESSOR: Hand me your torch.

MANNY: What?

PROFESSOR: Your flashlight, hand it over.

MANNY: Alright, here.

(MANNY hands over the flashlight.)

PROFESSOR: There seems to be something in the walls, embedded in the limestone. It's catching the light. Can you see?

MANNY: Pyrite.

PROFESSOR: Hmm?

MANNY: It's pyrite. The Mayan people placed it in their tunnels to make them sparkle. Like there were stars in the darkness below the ground.

PROFESSOR: It's fitting. Fool's gold for a foolish sentiment.

MANNY: I thought you would've known that. Being a professor and all that. That reminds me...what are you a professor of again?

PROFESSOR: My focus, you could say, is lost civilizations. Forgotten people.

MANNY: Forgotten people?

PROFESSOR: Yes. You might've read my work in National Geographic? I had a piece published recently on Uxmal.

MANNY: Uhuh. (beat) So what brought you to Mexico?

PROFESSOR: (scoffs) The Mayan of course.

MANNY: Right. (a breathy laugh) Of course.

(The wooden structure groans as it continues its descent.)

PROFESSOR: The walls of the, the uhh, tunnel, seem to be adorned with pictographs.

MANNY: (faux admiration) You can read those? (beat) What do they say?

PROFESSOR: Now, I could be wrong, I don't have my notes with me, but...

MANNY: Don't leave me hanging.

PROFESSOR: (he laughs) Well, it seems to be a depiction of a descent of sorts. And here, the word "mirror," their symbol for portal, perhaps into Xibalba. The Underworld.

MANNY: What about there? Those shapes, what do those say.

PROFESSOR: (beat, thinking) "Outsider," perhaps? "Foreigner?" No, no. That's not quite right. An individual looking from the outside in. Observer perhaps? And this glyph, is that "lord?"

(The PROFESSOR snaps his fingers, searching for the right word.)

PROFESSOR: Aha! Yes, of course. It must be about Hernán Cortés. The outsider, the lord from across the sea!

MANNY: (he laughs) Hahahaha.

(MANNY's laugh echoes and blends with the groaning of the wooden elevator.)

MANNY: You're so close.

PROFESSOR: Excuse me?

MANNY: You're close! That was almost right.

PROFESSOR: How would you know?

MANNY: Tell you what, I'll give you a hint. Rosa was a little heavy-handed with the chisel. That glyph you're reading as lord, "awah," it's actually "wink," meaning person.

PROFESSOR: (beat, the pieces are falling into place) Wink?

MANNY: Uhuh. And here... Snake. Smoke. Mirrors. And this one...this one is you. Read that for me, Professor.

PROFESSOR: M-mouse?

MANNY: No, no. Rat. Try again. The whole thing.

PROFESSOR: (he gulps) A, umm, well... A rat traveling down the throat of a, uhh..a—

MANNY: Come on.

PROFESSOR: A s-snake.

MANNY: (smug) Bueno. You got it.

PROFESSOR: What is this? What's going on here? Is this some sort of joke? Who put you up to this?

(MANNY is silent. He chuckles slightly as the wood groans.)

MANNY: A millennia.

PROFESSOR: What are you on about? I asked you a question, Manny and I deserve-

MANNY: (enjoying this) You really thought no one had been here in a millennia. You were so caught up in thinking you were making some career-changing discovery, that you didn't even hesitate to untie that rope.

PROFESSOR: But this is career-changing! No one has found this place, no one. It's on no map, it's in no books—

MANNY: And why do you think that is, Professor? What makes you so much more important than all those before you?

PROFESSOR: I...I uhh...

MANNY: You're not. You're just like all the rest. Waltzing in here with your rimmed glasses and posh accents and God, all that khaki.

PROFESSOR: All the rest?

MANNY: Now you're asking the right questions.

PROFESSOR: (unable to hide his disappointment) There have been others?

MANNY: So many. All of them looking to solve the same great mystery. The disappearance of the Mayan people. Do you want to know what happened to the Mayan people, Professor?

PROFESSOR: I-I'm sorry if I offended you in any way.

MANNY: Come on now, I mean it. I have the answer. The one you've been looking for your entire life. (beat) Ask me.

PROFESSOR: Wh-what happened to the Mayan people?

MANNY: You happened. You colonizers. We survived droughts, famines, wars, but then you came and you took, and took, until there was nothing left. Then you hid your greed, your atrocities behind a mystery. A question with an answer YOU erased from history books. (beat) But we survived. And we waited. And you came back, hungry for more.

PROFESSOR: I can give you money. My funding, all of it, it could all be yours.

MANNY: We don't need your money. We're actually doing well after the last guy, from Oxford I think.

PROFESSOR: Did you let him go?

MANNY: You're asking the wrong question.

PROFESSOR: Did you let any of them go?

MANNY: We let them go when they reached their stop.

(The wooden elevator groans, louder than before, almost relishing this moment.)

PROFESSOR: Where are we going?

MANNY: Xibalba. But, as you know, Professor...there is only one way to enter The Underworld.

PROFESSOR: Please. Please don't do this, I'm begging you.

(The wooden elevator finally comes to a stop, it groans once more as its weight is caught by the stone floor beneath them. MANNY whistles and it echoes through the darkness that surrounds them, an endless expanse filled briefly by MANNY's one whistle, and then suddenly by the whistling of dozens of people hidden in the darkness.)

MANNY: Welcome, Professor, to Xibalba.

PROFESSOR: No, please, no! Nooooo!

(The PROFESSOR's voice becomes a scream that echoes into the expanse, and slowly fades away.)