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The Hero Twins: Blood Race

By

RAMON ESQUIVEL

Dramatic Publishing Company

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The Hero Twins: Blood Race received workshop development at Write Now 2017, hosted by Childsplay. The play premiered at Appalachian Young People's Theatre in 2018.

CAST:

MOTH..... Emma Harkins
CRICKET/AQUILI..... Daniel Herman
MUSICIAN..... Ian Lee
PRIEST/RAZOR WARRIOR Elizabeth Mason Moore
MAQAB..... Marissa Plondke
IGUANA..... Mary Sass
JAGUAR..... Cameron Underwood

PRODUCTION:

Director/Producer..... Teresa Lee
Assistant Director..... Eileen Dixon
Stage Manager Maddie Coggin
Choreographer..... Sherone Price
Costume Designer..... Jennifer Ackland

A revised version of *The Hero Twins: Blood Race* premiered at the University of Texas at Austin in 2019.

CAST:

CRICKET/AQUILI..... Gilberto Beltran
MOTH..... Natasha Cosme Batista
IGUANA..... Annapaula Guajardo
GECKO..... Audrey Loomis
JAGUAR..... Adrian Nañez
MAQAB..... Phoebe Osbourne

PRODUCTION:

Director Will Kiley
Producers..... Megan Alrutz, Laura Dossett
Associate Director/Scenic Designer Juan Leyva
Associate Director/Assistant Stage Manager..... Savanna Cole
Stage Manager Callie Blackstock
Costume Designer..... Nanette Acosta, Austin Alvarez

Scenic Designers..... J.E. Johnson, Adrian Lopez
 Lighting Designer Ron Collins
 DramaturgyMichael McCaslin
 Fight Choreographer Adam Baglereau
 Movement Consultant..... Giana Blazquez
 Education and Tour Manager..... Yunina Barbour-Payne
 Education Team..... Grace Bohn, JJ Cortez, Emily Garcia,
 Vivian Gonzalez, Austin Howell

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Aurand Harris Grants and Fellowships are made possible through an endowment established by the late Aurand Harris and administered by the Children’s Theatre Foundation of America. Aurand Harris, one of this nation’s most published and performed playwrights for children and youth, enormously enriched the literature of American children’s theatre. Plays such as *Androcles and the Lion*, translated into ten languages, *The Arkansaw Bear*, *The Toby Show*, *Rags to Riches* and *To Ride a Blue Horse* are but a few of his plays that fill stages in this country and abroad. Harris’ writings, informed by his studies in Kansas and at Northwestern University and by his teaching, initially in the Gary, Ind., school system and subsequently, for more than thirty years, at Grace School in New York, have captured the spirit and interests of children for generations.

Harris had a deep concern for artists, particularly playwrights who devote their careers to creating quality theatre for young audiences, and for theatres who produce theatre for children. Through his foresight and generosity, the Children’s Theatre Foundation of America has been able to establish Aurand Harris Fellowships for artists serving young people and grants for small and mid-sized theatres throughout America.

PREFACE

This is an original story imagined by the playwright. It does not reflect any Mesoamerican or other Indigenous narratives, and it would be misleading to promote the play as such.

That said, the world of the play is inspired by the politics and culture of Classic Mayan society and influenced by Mayan narratives recorded in the Popol Vuh. Also, the Hero Twins of this play, Moth and Cricket, are homages to two pairs of Hero Twins in Indigenous narratives: Hunahpu and Xbalanque (Mayan), who outsmarted the Lords of Death in the underworld, Xibalba, and also Nayainazgana and Tobadzaschaina (Navajo), who rid the world of evil monsters.

It is the author's hope this play inspires audiences to seek out and learn the stories of those other Hero Twins.

The Hero Twins: Blood Race

CHARACTERS

MOTH: 14-16 years old, Cricket's twin sister.

CRICKET: 14-16 years old, Moth's twin brother.

IGUANA: 30s-40s, the high priest.

JAGUAR: 20s-30s, the king.

GECKO: 20s-30s, a priest.

AQILI: Spirit of Wind ("ah-KEE-lee").

MAQAB: Spirit of Water ("mah-KAHB").

RAZOR WARRIOR: Guardian of Stone Cavern.

HAMMER: A brash yet optimistic hammer.

CHISEL: A graceful yet pessimistic chisel.

SETTINGS

The Middleworld:

A cave outside a village of the Freed tribe

The Temple of the Blood Steps in the capital city of the
Privileged tribe

The Underworld:

Entrance to the caverns/bottom of the Blood Steps

Stone Cavern

Ice Cavern

Fire Cavern

Passages between caverns

Victor's Chamber

The Overworld:

A house

PRODUCTION NOTES

DIALOGUE: For overlapping text, dialogue with // indicates where the next line should begin. Text in [brackets] are to clarify intention of the line and should not be spoken out loud by the performer. Also, “The Story of the Blood Race” is written in the main script as a two-person narrative for Iguana and Gecko. Productions with larger casts may substitute the version in the back of the book, which is a type of narrative poem that may be interpreted and performed by a chorus of performers. If choosing the narrative poem, be sure to give Iguana the final line.

DESIGN: The play should feature the performers playing Cricket and Moth. It is written with parkour, capoeira, freerunning, gymnastics and other martial, dance and movement arts in mind. Set design should allow for seemingly miraculous movements of the twins around the staging area. For example, Moth’s stone obstacle course in the first scene could be a structure that is incorporated into other scenes, such as suggesting the three caverns of the Blood Race.

CASTING: The play is designed for four featured performers with the doubling below.

Performer 1- MOTH, HAMMER and CHISEL

Performer 2- CRICKET and AQILI

Performer 3- IGUANA and MAQAB

Performer 4- JAGUAR, GECKO and RAZOR WARRIOR

Larger casts are possible and encouraged. The same performers must play Moth/Hammer/Chisel and Cricket/Aqili.

The Hero Twins: Blood Race

(An old storyteller, GECKO, enters.)

GECKO. Have you heard the ancient stories about the Hero Twins? The Mayan people tell their story of the Hero Twins who defeated the Lords of Death in a sacred ball game. The Navajo people tell their story of the Hero Twins who fought evil monsters. But we are here to tell you a story of the Hero Twins who turned the sacred circle of the world upside down! This story begins a long time ago, or maybe not so long ago, in a cave.

(GECKO exits. In the cave, MOTH cuts stone. She inspects her work with HAMMER and CHISEL, tools that she voices and moves herself like puppets.)

MOTH. It's finished. It looks ready to prepare a champion. What do you think, Hammer?

HAMMER. Strong. Made for a warrior. What do you think, Chisel?

CHISEL. Beautiful. Made by an artist. What do you think, Moth?

MOTH. Smells good. Tastes good, too. Now for Cricket to test it. I just hope he's careful.

HAMMER. Cricket?

CHISEL. Careful?

(HAMMER and CHISEL both laugh.)

MOTH. I know, I know. But we can hope, can't we?

CRICKET (*offstage*). Moth? Moth, are you in there?

MOTH. Yes, we're in the—I mean ... I'm in the cave. Come inside!

CRICKET (*offstage*). You come outside. I want to show you something.

(MOTH exits the cave. She meets CRICKET just outside the entrance. He is looking up at the full moon, which is glowing red.)

MOTH. What do you want to show me, Cricket?

CRICKET. Moth, look up. Look at the moon.

MOTH. A Blood Moon!

CRICKET. You remember what the Blood Moon means, don't you?

MOTH. The priests tell us, "When the Blood Moon follows the setting Sun, the spirits demand the Blood Race be run."

CRICKET. The Blood Race will be run. Our village elders have chosen our runner.

(CRICKET looks downcast. MOTH is confused.)

MOTH. They did? So who did ... who did they choose?

CRICKET. They chose ... I can't say.

(CRICKET looks away dramatically.)

MOTH. Who did they choose?!

CRICKET. They chose ... me!

(CRICKET laughs at his own joke. So does MOTH.)

MOTH. You! Oh, I knew they would choose you, Cricket.

(They embrace. CRICKET reveals a jade amulet.)

CRICKET. Priests were with the village elders. One of them gave me this. She called it a Windstone.

MOTH. Windstone. This is jade. But Freed people are forbidden to wear jade.

CRICKET. Only the Freed people's runner can wear jade. I need it to enter the Underworld.

MOTH. When we cut jade in the quarry, it's rough and dusty. This jade is so clear and perfect.

(CRICKET looks around to see who is watching.)

CRICKET. Want to try it on? I won't tell.

MOTH. No! Defy the law of the spirits? Curse your chances in the Blood Race? Never. I will just admire it on you.

CRICKET. Fine. What do you think? Doesn't the jade make me look even prettier?

MOTH. It does. But your bragging makes you sound like a fool.

CRICKET. I can always depend on my sister to keep me humble.

MOTH. Now come inside the cave. It's my turn to show you something.

(They enter the cave. CRICKET sees what MOTH has been chiseling: a stone obstacle course.)

CRICKET. Moth! You cut all this stone? For me?

MOTH. All for you. The village elders chose you to run the Blood Race. You'll need to practice as much as you can. Try it out, but be careful.

CRICKET. Careful? You know me.

(CRICKET tests out MOTH's training course. He is awesome. When finished, he embraces MOTH.)

MOTH. So you like it?

CRICKET. I love it! Moth, you're the best sister in the world.

MOTH. I want to do everything I can to help you win.

CRICKET. You really think I can win?

MOTH. I do. So does everyone in the village. That's why the elders chose you.

CRICKET. Moth, what if ... what if I lose? I could lose, you know.

MOTH. You're the best runner // we've ever had.

CRICKET. No, I'm not! You know who was the best? Ox Beetle.

MOTH. The last runner.

CRICKET. Ox Beetle was bigger than me, stronger // than me—

MOTH. You're faster. More // graceful—

CRICKET. And Ox Beetle lost! He was a born runner, a natural runner. We believed Ox Beetle would finally win the race for the Freed people, and he lost.

MOTH. Ox Beetle spent more time bragging about the race than training for it.

CRICKET. I'm going to lose, Moth. I'll be trapped in the Underworld. I'm going to lose, and I'll never see you again.

MOTH. Hey! Hey, who are you? I want my brother back.

CRICKET. Why am I even doing this? I should never have accepted the honor. Maybe I can go back and tell // the elders—

MOTH. You can win! I know you can. But you will need to work harder than any runner ever has. The spirits gave you a twin sister who will help you prepare. I'm so proud of you.

(CRICKET glances at the curtain of vines.)

CRICKET. I want to make you all proud. I do. Are Hammer and Chisel proud of me, too?

MOTH. Uhh ... what? What are you talking about?

CRICKET. I heard you talking to Hammer and Chisel. You've been talking to Hammer and Chisel ever since Papá put them in our crib.

MOTH. Papá gave the tools to *you*. He gave *me* that ugly corncob doll.

CRICKET. I loved that ugly corncob doll! "Maizie." What a great name for a corncob doll. Better than "Hammer and Chisel" for a hammer and chisel.

(MOTH takes out HAMMER and CHISEL.)

MOTH. They like their names.

(CRICKET takes HAMMER and CHISEL.)

CRICKET. After Mamá and Papá died, it was only you and me, raising ourselves in this cave. We needed friends. I had Maizie, until I lost her in the jungle. You had Hammer and Chisel. *(He hands the tools to MOTH.)* Look what you made together. I thank the spirits that my twin sister is the most brilliant stonecutter in all the Freed villages. With Hammer and Chisel's help.

HAMMER. Shut up, Cricket.

CHISEL. Thank you, Cricket.

CRICKET. I thank all three of you.

MOTH. Now get going! We built this thing. Time to use it. The Blood Race begins in 180 days. Look, I made a calendar for us.

(MOTH reveals a hidden stone with nine squares, and beside them a rectangle with twenty holes.)

CRICKET. Numbers? Forbidden numbers?

MOTH. They're safe here in the cave. Now look: Each month is twenty days. This large rectangle has twenty pegs. We remove a peg after each day of training. On the twentieth peg, we chisel one of these nine squares. Then we put the twenty pegs back in and start over again on the next month. When we cross out all nine squares, we will be at 180 days.

CRICKET. Too many numbers. My head hurts. I feel dizzy.

(MOTH throws a stone at CRICKET.)

MOTH. Is the work already too hard for you, Ox Beetle?

CRICKET. Ox Beetle?!

MOTH. Don't just train your body for the Blood Race. Train your mind too.

CRICKET. What do words and numbers have to do with the Blood Race?

(MOTH throws another stone.)

MOTH. Speed, rate, momentum, angles. Logic. Strategy!

CRICKET. Run faster, jump higher, win the race.

MOTH. Why did Papá steal scrolls from the temple he helped to build?

CRICKET. To teach Mamá how to read.

MOTH. And why did Mamá learn how to read?

CRICKET. To teach *you* how to read.

(MOTH throws a third stone at CRICKET.)

MOTH. To teach me *and* you how to read. Remember what they used to always say? We free us. They died to give us this forbidden knowledge. To free us.

CRICKET. Forbidden knowledge got them killed. They left us alone, and we were only children! Words didn't help when winter hit and we were hungry. Numbers didn't help when you got that fever and almost died. Mamá and Papá said if we learned words and numbers, our lives would be better. They were wrong.

(CRICKET climbs to the top of the course.)

MOTH. What are you doing?

CRICKET. See what my body can do? My body will win this race for me. I have to be strong.

MOTH. You have to be smart too. Your body and mind together will win it.

CRICKET. My body is my gift. Natural talent. Your mind is your gift. Words and numbers are so easy for you. Don't you see? Me learning to think like you would be like ... you learning to run like me.

MOTH. That sounds like a challenge! If you trained me, I could run like you. With time and practice, I might even run better than you. Shall we begin?

CRICKET. Ha! You prove you can run?

MOTH. And you prove you can think. We teach each other.

CRICKET. Like we always have.

MOTH. Like Mamá and Papá wanted us to. We start with this.

(MOTH reveals the hidden memory stones.)

CRICKET. Your memory stones for Mamá and Papá.

MOTH. You remembered! You never visit them anymore, but you know they're here.

(CRICKET touches the stones for the first time in years.)

CRICKET. When I win, I promise you everything will change for us. We'll leave this cave forever.

MOTH. You can change everything for all our people. Read these words. You remember?

(CRICKET reads with difficulty.)

CRICKET. "Mosquito. Mamá. Cutter Ant. Papá."

MOTH. We speak their names.

CRICKET. "Mother and father of—" is that word "Moth?"

MOTH. Yes. And that word is you.

CRICKET. "Cricket." I remember.

(MOTH and CRICKET exit.)

IGUANA and a younger GECKO enter a village plaza. They address unseen Freed villagers. NOTE: Productions may substitute the narrative poem at the back of the book for "The Story of the Blood Race," to be performed by a chorus.)

IGUANA. People of this Freed village, listen to us. We are priests of the capital city of the Privileged tribe. I am called Iguana.

GECKO. I am called Gecko. We journey from Freed village to Freed village to remind you of the role you play in the great and ancient race that will soon be run. We give you—

IGUANA & GECKO. The Story of the Blood Race: A Beginning.

(The priests can use masks, puppets or other means to tell the story. During pauses, we catch glimpses of MOTH and CRICKET training.)

MOTH. Ahh, my legs are burning.

CRICKET. Burning is good. Can you feel your legs getting stronger?

(MOTH chisels a month on the calendar. They exit.)

IGUANA. From time immemorial we have been told: On that morning in the Overworld, Moon grew tired from shining in the sky for too long. Moon was waiting for Sun to awaken.

GECKO. But Sun lay in a deep, unnatural sleep. Poisoned!

IGUANA. Poisoned!

(MOTH and CRICKET enter with bark paper.)

MOTH. When we move fast, our bodies want to keep moving in the same direction. That is momentum. Use momentum to bounce off surfaces and carry us farther. Let's try it?

(MOTH chisels a month and both exit.)

GECKO. Sun had been poisoned! Moon saw a trail of strange liquid from Sun's mountain bed leading to caverns of the Underworld. Moon called down to its ruler.

IGUANA *(as Moon)*. Lord Volta of the Underworld! Why have you poisoned the Sun? Without Sun, morning cannot rise in the Middleworld.

GECKO. Lord Volta answered. *(As Volta.)* Our creation, the First We People, have forgotten me. By day, they praise Sun. By night, they dream of Moon. What about me, Lord Volta? Send the First We People to me, so that they may praise me. I will give them remedy to the sleep poison.

(CRICKET and MOTH enter. They train silently in the background as the priests continue.)

IGUANA. Moon was so angry at Lord Volta that their face grew bright red. This was the first Blood Moon. Moon spoke to the First We People in the Middleworld. *(As Moon.)* First We People, Lord Volta has poisoned Sun! Choose two of your fastest, strongest and wisest *men*.

GECKO. Men!

IGUANA *(as Moon)*. The two men will descend into the Underworld to praise Lord Volta, who will give them remedy to wake Sun. Then morning will return to the Middleworld. And Moon can rest.

GECKO. The First We People chose two men, Radá *(Pronounced: rah-DAH.)* and Kinzé *(Pronounced: keen-ZAY.)*. Moon gave each man a Windstone, which granted them passage to the Underworld.

IGUANA. In the Underworld, Lord Volta was waiting. He said to them—

GECKO *(as Volta)*. First We People! Stay in my caverns until you learn to praise me and dream of me as you do Sun and Moon.

IGUANA. Radá and Kinzé spoke to each other.

IGUANA *(as Radá)*. I, Radá, say that we have been given minds to think and bodies to act.

GECKO *(as Kinzé)*. I, Kinzé, say that we have been given what we need to free ourselves.

IGUANA *(as Radá)*. Let us both search for a way out of the Underworld.

GECKO *(as Kinzé)*. May the fastest, strongest and wisest man find the way out first.

GECKO. Radá and Kinzé raced through the mysterious caverns of the Underworld. They faced great challenge and terrible dangers. The first one through the caverns was ... Radá!

IGUANA (*as Radá*). Radá!

(The twins finish training. MOTH chisels the final month.)

MOTH. The time for the Blood Race has come. Are you ready, brother?

CRICKET. I'm ready, sister.

MOTH. You're going to win. All the Freed people believe in you.

CRICKET. Walk with me to the walls of the capital. These may be our final moments together.

(MOTH and CRICKET exit.)

IGUANA. The first one through the caverns was Radá! Radá entered Lord Volta's throne room, called the Victor's Chamber. There Radá found the Band of Blood. It spoke to Radá.

GECKO (*as the Band of Blood*). Radá, I am the Band of Blood. You have proven yourself most worthy to carry me to the Middleworld. Place me on your head, and I will cut you. Your blood will become a remedy for Volta's sleep poison. Feed your blood to Sun, so Sun will wake.

IGUANA. Radá did as he was told. Back in the Middleworld, he placed the Band of Blood on his head, and it cut him. Radá fed his blood, now a remedy, to the sleeping Sun. Sun woke and washed the world in light!

GECKO. Light! Sun spoke to Radá. (*As Sun.*) I, Sun, thank you, Radá of the First We People. Keep this Band of Blood. You and your tribe will have the privilege of wearing it today and tomorrow and tomorrow's tomorrow, or until another from another tribe proves more worthy.