

Kutuktin

derived from the narrative of
Jerzon Ayongchi

The kutuktin are a race greatly feared by the Ifiallig. They are said to walk the earth and to take skeletal forms. On nights when the moon is at its fullest, they roam the land of Fiallig in search of mortal flesh on which to feast. Among the Ifiallig, it is believed that should the leader of the kutuktin be slain, all the other kutuktin will perish with it.

Long, long ago, in a place called Fiangtin, there lived an old man named Lakay Chinomkay. One day, he decided to catch himself some frogs, crabs, and fish from a stream at nightfall. It was chilly that time of year. He waited for darkness to fall and, with his trusty *sulo* (torch), set out for Fiallok.

In those days, the fastest way to Fiallok was uphill passing through a burial ground. Many *anet-el* trees and dense vines were spread out along the way, obscuring the path. After an arduous trek, Lakay Chinomkay finally reached Fiallok.

Across the stream, there was somebody who had brought his own *sulo*, and like Lakay, was catching prey. "What are you catching?" the individual on the opposite bank asked Lakay Chinomkay.

"And what are YOU catching?" Lakay Chinomkay replied. They were both headed upstream as they fished.

"Don't capture the leeches."

"And why are YOU capturing the leeches?" responded Lakay who simply went on his way, fishing upstream.

“Why are you catching snakes?”

“And why are YOU catching snakes?” Lakay Chinomkay answered.

In the darkness, Lakay Chinomkay had not noticed it was a kutuktin that he conversed with. After a while, they reached Finaliw.

“Why are you catching frogs?” asked the kutuktin.

“And why are YOU catching frogs?” Lakay retorted once more. The kutuktin was incensed.

“Tonight, as you lay snoring we shall carry you away, you irksome old geezer,” muttered the kutuktin silently to itself.

His task completed, Lakay Chinomkay got out of the water to return to his *ator* at Fiangtin, which was right below Kunchiyan’s house. He left the kutuktin behind.

When Lakay Chinomkay arrived back at the *ator*, he found none of the youngsters who usually took naps there. He was alone. So, he just roasted his catch, ate, and drifted to slumber. As Lakay dozed, two kutuktin—a father and its son—made their swift and silent approach. The father kutuktin was the one Lakay Chinomkay had angered that same day.

“There, Lakay Chinomkay snores in his sleep. Come and let us carry away his *chakurug* as he lies in it,” said the father kutuktin. Cautiously, they carted off his *chakurug*.

They managed to get the *chakurug* all the way up to Wingian. Just when Lakay was about to turn in his sleep, the two hastily tossed the *chakurug* off the precipice, into the river that awaited far below. Lakay Chinomkay could not wake up in time to hold on to an *anet-el* tree or grasp one of the many vines that dangled about.

“You are doomed... and now we feast on your bones,” the kutuktin said.

The long fall off the cliff killed Lakay Chinomkay instantly. The two kutuktin made their way down the rock face to recover Lakay Chinomkay’s drowned corpse. They also retrieved his *chakurug*.

They proceeded to devour Lakay Chinomkay’s carcass. “His brain is mine,” declared the father.

“Then I will take his ears,” replied the son.

“I shall have his nose.”

“And I want his eyes,” the son exclaimed.

They split Lakay Chinomkay’s neck and took a hand apiece. Like a bunch of starved predators, they gnawed voraciously on his corpse. It took the kutuktin until midnight to polish off the bones of Lakay’s head and arms. Making their way to his torso, they tore off and ripped apart every morsel of his body.

Upon reaching his crotch, the father kutuktin said, “I shall take the shaft of his penis.”

“Leave me his testicles, then,” replied the son.

And again, they divided up Lakay’s legs.

Having finished with Lakay Chinomkay’s innards the father kutuktin said to his son, “Let us put his bones back together and return them to the *ator*. We could put them in this *chakurug*. This geezer was quite infuriating, he mocked me incessantly.”

So, they reassembled his skeleton and arranged it in the *chakurug*. They carried the *chakurug* back to the *ator* and left it there to be found.

When morning came, some residents of Fiangtin headed for Lakay Chinomkay's *ator* to warm themselves by the fire. Much to their bewilderment they noticed no smoke wafting from the *ator*. Perhaps Lakay Chinomkay had only fallen asleep, they thought. So, they proceeded to the *ator* anyway.

The sight of Lakay Chinomkay's bones came as a great shock to them, and they quickly concluded that this was the work of *kutuktin*. Petrified by fear, they ran about to inform the elders of the dire news. Two old men were already at the *ator* by the time they returned. The slaying of Lakay Chinomkay caused terrible anguish among the residents of Fiangtin. They gathered and buried his bones in grief.

Once Lakay Chinomkay's bones were buried, the villagers gathered around the fire to discuss their dilemma. Soon, it was decided that they were to formulate a plan to capture the *kutuktin* by the next rise and fall of the moon.

When the time finally came, the elders had assigned a fine youth of Fiangtin the task of apprehending the *kutuktin*. The young man agreed to the undertaking and was given advice on the best way to kill the *kutuktin*.

"Light a fire at the *ator* and cast your *fiangkaw* into the flames that it may grow hot," the elders instructed. "Lie down and feign slumber. Pretend to snore and lie in wait for the *kutuktin*."

On the night of the full moon, the youth headed to the *ator*. He shut the door and started the bonfire. Following the elders' instructions, he cast the tip of his spear into the fire to heat it. In the dead of night, the young man faked a snore. He distinctly heard the sound of feet scampering about the

ator. Then the shuffling noises stopped. His heart skipped a beat.

The young man then saw a leg protruding from the *sufia* (smoke window). He knew the kutuktin would enter from the *sufia* and would soon descend upon him. He waited until the kutuktin could fully make its way down to him.

The kutuktin was finally all the way down. The sheer horror of its appearance startled the young man and scared him stiff. Despite having been paralyzed by fear, the youth was able to gather his wits about him and retrieve his *fiangkaw* from the fire. He flung the weapon hurriedly, aiming for the kutuktin's ribs.

His *fiangkaw* scored a direct hit, sizzling as it seared its way through the kutuktin's body. The kutuktin tumbled from the attack it had sustained. The young man extracted his weapon turning the kutuktin over. It was dead. The young man still trembled in fright.

He immediately opened the door and dragged the lifeless kutuktin outside. Then he rushed back into the *ator*, barricading the door with a piece of wood. He stirred fretfully trying to sleep, but sleep would not overcome him for he feared the arrival of even more kutuktin. In preparation, he cast his spear into the fire once more.

At the cock's crow he gazed into the sky and saw it was beginning to brighten. He hesitated to step out just yet, ill at ease. He waited for dawn to fully break before opening the door of the *ator* to check on his fresh kill.

The kutuktin was not where he had left it. In its place was an atifiangran tree. Frightened, the young man returned to the *ator* and shut himself inside. The elders arrived moments later.

"Well, open up," they ordered.

“Oh, you are here,” the young man breathed a sigh of relief. At last, he was no longer alone.

“And where is your previous night’s quarry?” asked one of the elders.

“It was there just last night. All that remains in the spot now is that atifiangran,” he replied.

“Then perhaps that atifiangran is the kutuktin. Their shapes *are* similar,” said an old man. Ever since then, whenever an atifiangran is seen, it has been said to resemble a kutuktin.

They praised the brave Ifiallig for his valor and rejoiced at his victory. They waited until the sun was out in full before setting the atifiangran on fire and it gave off a unique odor. It might very well have been the slain kutuktin. So too, must it have been the leader of the kutuktin, for no kutuktin appeared in Fiangtin ever again.