

FINDING NIGHT

Quat the Creator

In the beginning, there was light. It never dimmed, this light over everything. It was bright all-light everywhere, and there was no rest from it.

Under the light was a huge stone. The stone was the mother, Quatgoro. Quatgoro split in half, and there came twelve sons born into the light. They were Quat and his eleven brothers.

The brothers were all named Tangaro, but they were not the same. The first brother after Quat was Tangaro the Wise. The second was Tangaro the Fool. The names of the other nine were names of leaves, such as Breadfruit Leaf, Coconut Leaf, Bamboo Leaf, and so on. They all grew up as soon as they were born, just as Quat had.

Quat named himself when he was born. He had no father to name him. Right away, he thought about making men. And he thought about making other things—plants, pigs, and stones.

Quat made the first human from a tree. He carved arms and then legs, and he made the rest of the body apart from them. He

made fingers and hands, toes and feet. He made ears and eyes—all neatly and carefully. Then he fitted the parts together.

He made six of these wood puppets. And he stood them in a line so he could do a sacred dance in front of them.

Soon the puppets began to move. They moved just a little at first; they moved stiffly. But they moved. Quat beat on his sacred drum. The drumbeats were like magic. The puppets moved more with each beat. They moved faster until they were doing the dance of life to the drumbeats.

Now the puppets that had life were able to stand, to walk, to run along. Quat fixed them into men and women. There were three women and three men. Each of the women had a husband, and each of the men had a wife. That is the way it was.

Quat was being watched by his brother, who was Tangaro the Fool. Everything the Fool did came out wrong. But he thought he would make men and women, too, as Quat had.

“Think I’ll cut down a tree,” he thought. And he did, but it was different from Quat’s tree. Still, Tangaro the Fool carved six model puppets as he had seen Quat do. He propped them up and did a dance in front of them. He beat the drum to give his puppets life. He saw them move. But he dug a pit and buried them, he was so stupid. Then he left them and went away.

A week later, Tangaro the Fool remembered the six figures he had made from the tree wood. He had forgotten all about them. He dug up the earth where they were, and he scraped it from them.

What he found there had rotted. He was forced to leave his puppets buried, they smelled so bad. So this, then, was the beginning of Death. That is the way Death came to the world, when Tangaro the Fool buried his wood figures and they rotted.

Meanwhile, brother Quat was making pigs. At first he had them stand up on two legs and walk that way. When his brothers saw this, they pointed and laughed and laughed.

“Your pigs look like men!” they exclaimed.

Quat didn’t want the pigs to be laughed at. So he shortened their front legs. Now the pigs walked on four feet instead of two. They walk that way even now.

In this way Quat made many things. He thought to make all kinds of plants, canoes—all kinds of things.

“It’s too light,” his brothers said one day. “Quat, do something. We don’t like the world so bright all of the time. Make something to stop it, please, Quat.”

Quat looked everywhere for something. Something that was not light. He could find nothing. Light was everywhere. But he thought about making a place without light. He’d heard about such a place at the far edge of the sky, and it was called *Qong*, Night. Quat tied a pig to his canoe and sailed over the sea toward the far edge.

He sailed and sailed. Finally, Quat reached the edge where the sky came down and he could touch it. There lived *Qong*.

Night was dark. It had no light anywhere in it. It touched

Quat about his eyes and gave him the blackest eyebrows. It taught him sleep, as well. And the great darkness, Night, gave him another piece of itself.

So Quat went home, taking the piece of Night in his hand. On the way, he stopped at the Torres Islands. He gave the people his pig and a small bit of his piece of Night. They gave him birds of all kinds. That is why the Torres have pigs and night to this day.

When Quat reached home, he brought darkness with him. And he brought birds which always follow the night with their noise of waking. That is how we tell that day is coming.

Quat's brothers were waiting for him.

"Hurry," said Quat. "I will show you how to make your beds."

He showed them how to use coco fronds, which he spread on the floor. Then he showed his brothers how to lie down and how to rest, ready for sleep.

"Look, the sun is going," said the brothers. "Will it return again?"

"Night is getting ready," Quat said. And he let the piece of Night come from his hand.

"What is this that covers everything and the sky?" his brothers asked.

"It is Night," said Quat. "Lie down; be still."

The brothers did lie down, and they soon felt weightless and dreamlike. Not long after, their eyes closed.

"I think we must be dying," said the brothers.

"It is just sleep," said Quat. "That's what it is called."

The birds knew about Night and how long it would be. They could tell; they could feel it passing by. As it passed, they chirped, whistled, and squawked.

Quat took a sharp, red stone and cut a hole in Night. The first light that came out of the tear was red light. And then all of the light shone brightly. The birds made noise, for they knew what first light looked like.

The brothers' eyes opened wide; they started their chores.

This is the way it is for us: Night comes. We sleep. Birds cry.

We wake. Day comes. We work. All because of Quat.

Day in, day out.

COMMENT: Quat is the solar god of the Banks Islands, north of the New Hebrides in Melanesia. The tales about him are many and varied. This myth relates a beginning filled with light. Rather than creating light, Quat must discover Night. There are twelve sons of Quatgoro, the great seed, one for each month of the year. If Quat's foolish brother hadn't buried his wood puppets, humankind would have lived forever. But because of the brother's stupidity, Death was brought into the world. Yet Quat travels to the edge of the horizon, or the end of creation, where he finds the night, brings it back, and is able to finish his own making of the world.