

Introduction: Maxakali Creation Story

Long ago, in the time of the ancient Maxakali, Topar, the creator, gave the Maxakali an otter. Topar said, “This otter is to help you fish so that you always have something to eat. But remember, you must always give the three biggest fish to the otter. You are welcome to all of the rest. You may fill your sacks full of the little fish so that the whole community can eat, so that no one goes hungry. The three biggest fish, however, are the otter’s.” And this is how it was done for many years.

And in that time of the ancient Maxakali, the son-in-law of the guardian of the otter decided that he would like to go fishing with the otter. He said, “Hey grandfather, I’d like to fish with the otter. Would you loan it to me?” The old man replied, “Sure, but remember this otter belongs to the community and that we have an agreement with Topar that the three biggest fish must be given to the otter. If you do not do this, then everything will come to an end.”

This man, the son-in-law, took the otter and went down to the river. When he got there, he threw the otter into the water. The otter dove in and after a few minutes came out of the water with three enormous fish. The otter tossed the fish onto the riverbank and quickly dove back into the water in search of more fish. The otter brought back more and more fish, until the man almost had his sack filled. But the son-in-law could not keep his mind off the three enormous fish that the otter had first brought out of the river. He thought to himself, “I’m not going to give those three big fish to the otter. I’m going to take them for myself. Besides, he’s not going to notice. That otter doesn’t know any better.” So when the otter was making one of his last dives for fish, the son-in-law put those enormous fish into his sack and left for the village.

The otter returned to find that his fish had been taken. So the otter dove back into the river and swam away downstream. On his way back to the village, the man began to rethink his decision. He quickly returned

to the river and started yelling, “Otter! Otter! Please return! I’ll give you the enormous fish! Please come back, otter! I promise, I’ll give you the fish!” He kept calling to the otter, but the otter no longer understood his language.

The man then returned to the village. His sack was full of fish but he was sad. He went up to the old man and explained, “Oh grandfather, I’ve done something very wrong. I kept the three biggest fish and so the otter has gone away.” The grandfather said, “Oh no! You’ve really made a serious mistake. Tonight we are going to suffer a terrible punishment. The otter was given to the community to ensure that we would never go hungry.”

The son-in-law then returned to his hut, sad and preoccupied. When night fell, it started to rain and rain and rain. Everyone became very frightened. News of what had happened had spread throughout the community, and so they knew that this could be their punishment. They woke to find everything flooded. So they ran for the woods. They climbed the trees to get out of the water. But the rain kept coming and coming. It rained and rained. Eventually, the water became so high that it swept the trees away with the people on them.

But the son-in-law was clever. He had decided not to seek refuge in the trees. Instead he decided to hide. So as the waters were rising, he quickly grabbed some deerskin, crawled inside a log, and sealed himself there.

Eventually the rain stopped and the waters receded. But the man was so weakened after having spent so many days in the log that he didn’t even have enough strength to pull himself from the log. Then the creator returned with a friend to see how the Maxakali were doing. This time Topar, the creator, returned as a beetle. As he was buzzing around, talking with his friend, the Maxakali in the log started yelling, “Topar! Topar! Get me out of here, Topar! I’m trapped in here! Get me out of here!” Finally, Topar heard the faint sounds and followed them to the log.

Topar pulled the Maxakali from the log. That Maxakali was ugly. He was white, skinny, and covered with shit. He was a mess. Topar said, “Don’t worry, I’ll save you.” So he made a fire and began to roast the Maxakali the way one would a chicken. That helped the Maxakali to warm up. “Now I’m going to give you *your* food,” Topar declared. He gave the Maxakali bananas, manioc, honey, peanuts, melon, and watermelon.

This is why, to this day, the Maxakali still don't care for beans and other foods of the white.

After the Maxakali ate and began to feel better, Topar said, "Fine, let's go. I'll take you with us." The Maxakali said, "No, I'm not going with you. I'm not God. I'm going to stay here. I want to stay here." The Maxakali was afraid to go with Topar. And Topar said, "But what are you going to do here all alone? There aren't any women. There are only animals." But the Maxakali was determined to stay and so replied, "No, I'm not going. I want to stay here."

Time passed, and the Maxakali was becoming quite discouraged. He was feeling extremely sad. Everyone was gone; all the Maxakali had died in the flood. Then one night, feeling lonely, sitting next to the fire making arrows, he heard some voices in the distance. He became very still so that he could better hear the voices. He recognized them. They were human voices. He became excited because they were speaking Maxakali.

So he went in the direction of the voices. Finally he arrived at a small house and there was a woman inside cooking. But she wasn't really a human. She was a deer. He said, "Good evening, is your husband around?" She said, "No, I'm afraid he's out working in the fields. But come in and have a seat." He said, "No, I think I'll go out and introduce myself to your husband." So he left with his bow and arrows.

There in the field the buck was working hard. He was tilling the soil and pulling out weeds. He was working so hard that he didn't even notice the Maxakali. And while that buck was working hard, the Maxakali carefully aimed his arrow and shot the buck dead. So he murdered the deer's husband and returned calmly to the house. He told her that he couldn't find her husband out in the field. So she said, "Well, let's wait for him to return. He probably went hunting." They waited and waited, but he never returned.

When the buck never returned, the Maxakali and the deer decided to wed. The problem was that the Maxakali didn't know how to have sex with a deer. So first he had sex with her toes and she grew a baby in her leg—that is where the potato in the back of our leg comes from. Then he tried having sex in various other places, but the babies would never grow in his wife's stomach. Well, Topar had been watching everything

and decided to help the Maxakali out. He said, “I’m going to show you how it works.” So he grabbed a small machete and cut the deer open between her legs to make her sex. Then he showed the Maxakali how to have sex with his wife so that they could have children. After that, the Maxakali people were born — anew.