Inuit Mythological Characters & Elemental Beings

The stories told by Inuit elders are full of fantastic creatures, spirits and strange beings. Here are some examples of such characters from our southern homeland.

Tarriakuit

The Tarriakuit are known as the shadow people. They live in a world like our own. Their world, however, is beyond our senses. They are almost never seen, but sometimes when conditions are right the Tarriakuit can be heard. Have you ever heard the sounds of footsteps or the sound of talking or laughing in the distance but seen no one around? Maybe it was a Tarriakuit!

Sometimes these shadow beings are sick or people sense their presence. When this happens, the Tarriakuit seem to disappear into the ground and vanish. Stories tell us that some trout have crossed over into this shadow world, but few have ever returned to tell us what it is like.

If the Tarriakuit invited you to crossover into their world for a visit, would you go?

Kuklingatlaq/Agginaanq

These are marine creatures of the cold Arctic waters. They are often described as having scaly and bumpy skin, not unlike a sea serpent. It is said that these ugly creatures turn to evil if left alone. Artifacts of the Kuklingatlaq are only trying to keep children honest and respectful.

If children do not learn to respect the property of others, then maybe a Kuklingatlaq will teach them to do so when no one else is around.

Galupilliluit

These are marine creatures of the cold Arctic waters. They are often described as having scaly and bumpy skin, not unlike a sea serpent. It is said that these ugly creatures turn to evil if left alone. Artifacts of the Galupilliluit are often found in the areas where children are known to be disrespectful.

Mahaha is tricked into leaning over a water hole to take a drink and is pulled into the water. A Galupilliluit might be hiding under the sea.

If you ever encounter the Galupilliluit, remember to talk to as many people as possible before your memory begins to fail and you completely forget the experience.

Ijrait

The first one is the shape-shifter. These nell spirits are elusive and can transform into any animal or object themselves. Most often they take the shape of a river, a beaver or even a human. The only way the Ijrait cannot deceive are their red eyes. In all of its forms, both human and animal, their eyes are always red.

These elusive creatures are portrayed as evil and malicious in many stories. These stories warn that the Ijrait is in wait for the travelers, changing shape to fool and get close to them.

Some elders argue that these land spirits are not inherently evil, but rather manipulative. Some elders believe that the Ijrait often appear to bring harm to travelers. One elder stated that these spirits are surrounded by mist. When mist or clouds form on the horizon look bigger or closer than they really are, the Ijrait might be near.

Many interpretations of the Ijrait exist, one thing is certain after an encounter with the Ijrait. The person will experience memory loss and quickly forget the details of what happened.

Mahaha: The Tickler

Mahaha is a mischievous demon that is said to have terrorized parts of the Arctic for centuries. This creature is a thin, scrawny being, one that is taller in colour and cold to the touch. Mahaha’s eyes are white and piercing, and they peer through the long strings that hang over its face. This creature is extremely strong and is always seen bawling and almost naked.

Mahaha is a stealthy creature that creeps up on unsuspecting fruit. When it gets close enough, Mahaha delights in tickling its victims to death with its sharp, vicious nails attached to its long, bony fingers. The only reason the victim makes it to the ground is because of the Ijrait’s interference.

Although many interpretations of the Ijrait exist, Mahaha is rarely found. Most of the stories told about Mahaha are not actually true. Sometimes Mahaha is tricked into leaping over a water hole to take a drink and is pulled into the open water and swept away by the currents.

So, if Mahaha ever comes your way, don’t let it have your drink with you, the water hole, so you can push it in.

Inukpasugjuit

The Inukpasugjuit are the northern giants. Very little is known of these huge creatures. Inukpasugjuit are rarely seen and almost never talked about by elders. It seems like males are larger and less common than the females. Very little is known of the males. Perhaps this is because no one has ever survived to talk about them.

The female Inukpasugjuit seems to be more common. These Inukpasugjuit find humans amusing and will catch them to use as playthings. Some elders warn that the females will grab people and carry them away in their arms.

If you ever see an Inukpasugjuit, cut down and remain very still; your best chance of escape is to avoid being seen.