

The giant man-eating monster

A story from the Tlingit tribe of southern Alaska and British Columbia

A long time ago, there was a giant who loved more than anything to kill humans, eat their flesh, and drink their blood. The monster killed many people and terrified everyone. Soon the people came together to come up with a plan to try and destroy the giant.

One very brave man said that he would try and kill the monster himself. He knew where the monster had last been seen, and went to this place. There he laid down and pretended to be dead. Soon the monster came along this path, and when he saw the man he said to himself, "These people are so afraid of me that they are dying just at the thought of me. See. This one here would make a good meal. I don't even have to run and chase after him."

When the giant touched the body, he felt that it was still warm and fresh. The monster smiled and said, "I will carry him home and cook him for dinner."

The giant picked up the man and flung him over his shoulder, and the man continued to pretend to be dead. When the giant got to his home, he dropped the man near his fireplace and began to prepare a fire. The monster saw that he did not have enough firewood to cook the man, so went out to collect some more.

As soon as the monster stepped out of his home, the man jumped up and grabbed the giant's knife. While he was waiting for the monster to return, he heard someone approaching the home. It was the giant's son, who was also a giant, but not as big as his father. When the giant's son bent down to enter the home, the man jumped up and put the knife to the giant's son's throat.

"Tell me how to kill the giant, or I will kill you instead," threatened the man.

The young giant was afraid, and cried out, "My father's heart is in his left heel," he explained. "If you stab your knife into his heel he will be killed."

And so the man waited with his knife at the throat of the monster's son. Soon the giant returned with the firewood. As the monster stepped into his home, the man quickly plunged the knife into the monster's heel. The monster screamed and fell to the floor.

As it was dying, the monster spoke, "Even though you killed me, I am going to keep eating you and all of the other people in the world until the end of time."

On hearing this, the man wanted to be sure that the monster was unable to return to life. He cut up the monster into small pieces and burned each piece in a fire. Then, the man took the ashes and threw them into the air so that the winds could scatter them far and wide. However, as soon as the man threw the pieces of ash into the air, they turned into mosquitoes. A huge cloud of mosquitoes surrounded the man and began to sting him and suck his blood.

The man could hear the monster's voice laughing. "I will eat you and all of the people in the world until the end of time," the voice said again.

Glooscap fights the water monster

A story from the Passamaquoddy people of Maine

A long time ago, the people only had one small stream which was their only source of water. It usually gave the people cold, clear water, but one day the spring ran dry. It remained dry even when the fall rains came and the winter snow melted. The wise men and elders came together and decided to send a man north to see why their stream had run dry.

The man followed the dry bed of the stream for many days until he came to a village. The people in this village were not like humans. They had webbed hands and feet. At the village, the bed of the stream had widened out, and the small amount of water in it was slimy, green, and stinking. Being very thirsty from his journey, he asked the webbed feet people for a little water to drink, even though it was bad.

“We can’t give you any water,” said the people of the webbed feet, “unless our great chief allows it. He wants all of the water for himself. You must follow the river bed to find him.”

The man continued north to find the chief of the webbed feet people. He soon saw a monster that was so big that it was taller than the sky. It lay sleeping in the valley between the mountains and filled the land from end to end. The monster had dug himself a huge hole and dammed up the river to keep all of the water to himself. The monster had a large mouth, and his eyes stuck out of his head. His body was fat and covered in warts. “What do you want?” asked the monster when he saw the man.

The man was afraid, but said, “I come from a village downstream. Our only spring ran dry because you’ve been keeping all of the water to yourself.”

The monster replied, “I don’t care if you want water. Don’t bother me or I’ll swallow you up!”

Back at his village, the man told the people, “Nothing can be done. If we complain the monster will kill us all.” The people were in despair and prayed to Glooscap, who heard his people and decided to set things right.

Glooscap prepared himself for war. He rushed toward the village of the webbed feet people full of thunder and lightning and might, with eagles circling above him. When he came to the webbed feet people he demanded water. They were so afraid that they gave him some of the green stinking water. Glooscap was angry. “I want clean water for my people downstream,” he demanded.

Just then, the chief of the webbed feet people yelled, “All the waters are mine go away or I’ll kill you!” Glooscap and the monster fought. The mountains shook. The Earth split open. The swamp smoked and burst into flames. The monster opened his huge mouth to swallow Glooscap, but Glooscap made himself taller than the tallest trees, took his knife, and slit the monster’s bloated belly. From his belly gushed a roaring river, tumbling down the valley towards the village of his people.

“That will be enough water for my people,” said Glooscap. Then Glooscap took the monster into his hand and squeezed and squeezed until the monster was very small. When Glooscap opened his hand, the monster had been turned into a bullfrog, and to this day the bullfrog has wrinkled skin because Glooscap squeezed it so hard.

The Hero of the Horned Snake

A Cherokee story from Tennessee, Georgia, Kentucky & South Carolina

In ancient times there were very large snakes that shone as brightly as the sun. These snakes had horns on their heads and magic power. If anyone saw one of these snakes it was a bad omen. You could not run from these snakes because they had the power to attract their prey, and you could only run towards them to your death. Only a very skilled medicine man or powerful hunter was able to kill a horned snake. They could only be killed by shooting an arrow into the seventh stripe on the snake's skin.

There was once a Shawnee youth who was held captive by the Cherokees. The Cherokees told him that they would give him his freedom if he could kill one of the horned snakes. The youth hunted for many days before he found one. He prepared to kill the snake by making a large circle of fire, then he walked toward the horned snake. When the snake saw the hunter, it slowly raised its head.

As the snake rose, the youth carefully counted the stripes along its body, then aimed and shot his arrow through the seventh stripe. Turning quickly, he jumped into the ring of fire where he would be safe from the dying snake.

A stream of poison flowed out of the snake's body, but it was stopped by the fire. As the snake lay dying, its heart spoke to the youth. "Please, whatever you do, don't cut the horn from my head," begged the snake.

Soon the poison had stopped flowing from the snake the youth jumped out of the ring of fire. With great difficulty, he managed to cut the horn of the snake off at its base. He knew that if he had not done this, the snake would have come back to life.

Then, he heard the heart of the snake speak again. "At least be so kind as to stick the tip of my horn into the wound that you made with your arrow, at the seventh stripe on my body." This, of course, the youth would not do, for it would have brought the snake back to life.

"Go and cut a piece off of my body, roast it, and eat it," begged the heart of the snake. But the youth knew that this would have killed him instantly. Finally, the heart of the snake asked, "Take sacred tobacco and burn it along with my body." But if the youth had done that, all of the snake's many children, who were monsters themselves, would have come out of the streams and pools to kill the youth.

Because the youth had refused the heart of the snake's requests four times, the magic of the snake now belonged to him. He returned to the Cherokees with the horn of the snake, and because of his bravery, the Cherokees gave him his freedom as promised.

Days later, the Cherokee medicine men went to the spot where the youth killed the snake. They gathered parts of the snake's bones and skin, tying them into a sacred bundle. The Cherokees kept the sacred bundle for their children and grandchildren because they believed it would bring good fortune to the tribe.

In this same spot, a lake was formed containing black water. The Cherokee women would dip the twigs used in basket making into the water, and this is how they learned to dye their baskets.