

TIDDALIK

The thirsty frog of Dreamtime mythology

Tiddalik the frog is one of many creatures found in the ancient stories of Australia's Aboriginal peoples. These tales form an important part of the Aboriginal peoples' beliefs, known as the Dreaming, which explain how the world was formed long ago, and why things are the way they are.

The story of Tiddalik was first told by the people of South Gippsland, in southeastern Australia – but it's become so popular that it has spread all over the country and around the world. A frog that can swallow vast amounts of water, Tiddalik may have originally been based on a real frog species, the water-holding frog, which stores water in its body to survive the dry season hiding underground. It's when Tiddalik wakes up that trouble starts...


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MAPINGUARI

One-eyed, two-mouthed terror of the rainforest

According to local legends, a reddish, bear-like beast roams through the undergrowth of the Amazon rainforest: the monstrous Mapinguari. Though it's very big, it is skilled at sneaking slowly and silently through the jungle, so if a Mapinguari is nearby, you won't always hear it. However, you might smell it, as its matted fur gives off a revolting stench of garlic, dung and rotting meat.

Once you do spot it, the Mapinguari is a terrifying sight. It has one huge eye in the middle of its forehead, powerful jaws, and long, backwards-facing claws on its feet. When it spots a human, it rears up on its hind legs, towering up to two metres tall and revealing a second, gaping mouth with razor-sharp teeth in the middle of its belly!

It's also known as the roaring beast, on account of its bloodcurdling, screaming growl. Under its fur, its skin is armoured like a crocodile's, and no bullets or arrows can harm it. Some say the Mapinguari is a vegetarian, but there are other reports of it rampaging through farms, eating cows. It rarely attacks people, but can easily destroy anyone who gets in its way.

The Mapinguari does have one weakness, however: it hates water. And the rainforest has countless rivers, streams and pools, which can stop it in its tracks. As long as there's a stream between you and the beast, you're safe!

The Princess and the Zilant

Long, long ago, a powerful princess ruled the city of Kazan. She was a brave warrior, and her archery skills were admired across the land. However, a great army from the east was sweeping through Russia and Europe, and Kazan was in danger.

Many of the princess's soldiers had died in battle, and her army was too small to fight off the invaders. She needed help. So she called her chief advisor, and said: "Go and seek out the fierce Zilant who lives in the cave on the hill, and ask him to come and see me."

The advisor thought the princess must be crazy. Everyone knew the Zilant was an evil dragon who flew around gobbling people up. But he went to the cave and asked the Zilant if he would come to meet the princess. To his surprise, the Zilant agreed, and followed the advisor to the castle, where the princess was waiting.

"Thank you, mighty Zilant, for coming to see me," the princess began. "I need your help. Invaders from the east are approaching, and we cannot compete with them. Will you guard the city?"

The Zilant thought for a minute, and then answered: "I will help you. But I require payment."

"What payment?" asked the princess.

The Zilant answered, "I need a constant supply of food, including plenty of fresh grass, and a child and a woman every three weeks."

"Agreed," said the princess.

Satisfied with the deal, the Zilant set off to guard the city. He built himself a nest from chains, suspended from a tall oak tree, and curled up inside it for a nap.

The poor princess was in turmoil. She had to agree to the Zilant's demands, but she could not sacrifice her people. She had three weeks to see off the invaders and somehow get rid of the Zilant too.

The Zilant was lying in his nest when he heard the sound of hooves, and thought the invading army had arrived. He flew out of his nest like an arrow on fire. But as he swooped down, he saw a scruffy man on a tired-looking old horse, leading a band of knights.

The Zilant was confused. "Is this the enemy?" he wondered. "Surely not! He's not scary at all!" He flew closer, lowering his neck to take a closer look. As he did so, the peasant whipped out his sword and sliced the dragon's head off.

The Zilant had been right – this was not the invading army. The man was Gol, a poor peasant, who had persuaded the knights to follow him by boasting that he was a great fighter. When he saw the dragon, Gol thought he was doomed. But he grabbed the chance to kill the Zilant and save his own life.

The princess was so impressed, she invited Gol and his knights into her castle. She sent for a bottle of Water of Heroes, a magical medicine that she drank every day. She gave some to Gol, and he became a brave warrior. With Gol and his knights, the princess fought off the invaders and saved the city of Kazan.



RAINBOW FISH

Ginormous, greedy fish of Hindu legend

According to ancient Hindu mythology, the massive, multicoloured Rainbow Fish once swam the waters of the world. This fabulous fish was covered in sparkling scales in four different colours. Her green scales were made of grass, and symbolized the Earth. She also had yellow scales, made of lightning and evoking the air. Her red scales were made of flames, a tribute to the element of fire. Lastly, she had blue scales made of ice that embodied water.

The Rainbow Fish was as big as the biggest whale, and she swam all around the seas and oceans, always hungry and searching for food. One day, she saw a light shining on the surface of the water, and swam straight towards it to gobble it up. She swallowed it in one massive gulp, but little did she realize that she had eaten none other than golden-skinned, peace-loving Buddha, one of the many avatars, or forms, of the great god Vishnu.

The people could not allow one of the most important gods to be eaten by a fish. They had no choice but to rescue him. So the fishermen chased and caught the Rainbow Fish, and cut her open to free Vishnu from her stomach. Although the Rainbow Fish was sadly no more, her body was so enormous that there was enough fish for everyone in the country to live on for a whole year.



OCEANIA

Oceania stretches across Australia, New Zealand and the far-flung islands of the South Pacific. Australia's Aboriginal peoples tell stories about the creatures of the Dreaming, the ancient time before humans were created.