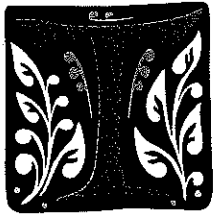




*While some people do not like the thought of hunting, many peoples around the world, including the Inuit, or Eskimos, once relied on animals for most of their food and clothing needs. Hunting was a matter of survival and, as this tale from the northern reaches of Canada describes, often dangerous.*

# Tuk the Hunter



his is the story of a boy named Tuk (took) who wanted to grow up to be a great hunter like his father.

Tuk was still too young to go on hunting trips, but he listened carefully to everything his father told him and was given many of the hunting chores. He helped ready the dogsled for each trip and had learned how to sharpen the hunting spears and knives. He practiced thrusting a spear and even knew how to cut up a carcass, throwing scraps to the dogs.

Tuk dreamt of the day when he would make his first kill. In his mind, he stalked not only the seals and walruses his father spoke of, but also that fearsome hunter, the polar bear. Tuk had given the big bear a nickname—White Monster.


Each evening when the work was done, Tuk took out his own little knife to carve soapstone toys. He made simple dolls his sister dressed in tiny sealskin clothes and animals of every kind. He carved sleek seals and killer whales, and even a tiny likeness of the White Monster. These

Tuk's father slowed the dogs and motioned to Tuk to stay behind in the sled. Then he jumped off the sled and onto his hands and knees. Tuk watched as his father crept silently toward the seal, his spear held ready in one hand. Tuk's father was not the only one stalking the seal. From behind a snowbank appeared an enormous dirty-white polar bear. When it saw Tuk's father, it changed direction and began moving toward him, instead. Before Tuk could cry out a warning, the polar bear sprang at his father, knocking the spear out of his hand and pinning him to the ground.

Tuk and his father tied the last things to the sled, then set off, waving good-bye to Tuk's mother and sister. They had not gone far when Tuk's father pointed to something in the distance. Straight ahead lay a fat seal with its back to them, sunning itself near an ice hole.

are the animals I will hunt someday, Tuk thought as he carved. At last the day came when his father announced that Tuk was ready to go on his first hunting trip. Together they packed the sled with food, spears, knives, and everything else they would need for the journey. Tuk was so excited he could hardly eat his morning meal. "Eat up," Tuk's father advised. "We have a long day ahead of us, and you'll be glad you ate a good breakfast."





Tuk grabbed an ax from the sled and ran toward the bear. “No, Tuk, keep away!” shouted his father. “Don’t come near!”

But Tuk paid no attention and began swinging wildly at the polar bear with the ax. Holding Tuk’s father with one paw, the bear tried to defend itself with the other. But it was unable to do both and, instead, rose on its hind legs with an angry growl and started after Tuk.

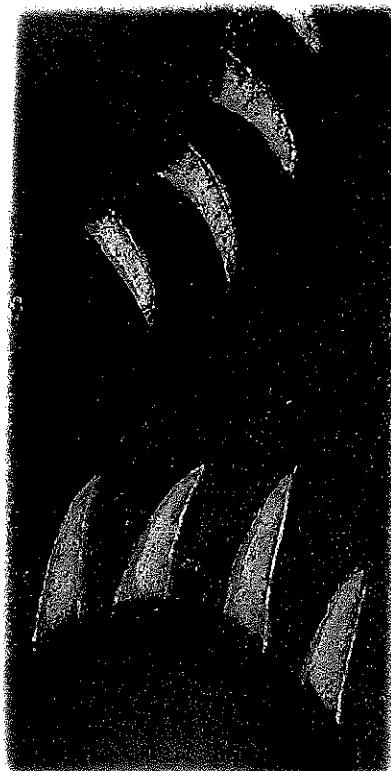
The boy turned and ran, dodging in and out of the snowbanks. He was just a few lengths ahead of the bear when he saw his father coming toward him on the dogsled.

“Quick, jump on!” Tuk’s father commanded, and somehow Tuk was able to grab hold of the sled. They raced all the way back to the igloo, not daring to turn to see if the bear was following. When they reached the igloo, the dogs came to a quick stop. All the spears and knives rolled off the sled.

“Never mind,” said Tuk’s father, “we don’t have time to pick them up. Quick, unharness the dogs and get them into the igloo.”

Tuk did as he was told, then clambered in after them. Tuk’s father was the last one in, quickly blocking up the igloo entrance with snow.

Tuk and his father told his mother and sister everything that had happened. They looked out one of the igloo’s clear ice windows and saw that the polar bear had indeed followed Tuk and his father home. The huge beast was pacing back and forth, occasionally swiping at the igloo with his claws.



Tuk knew it was just a matter of time before the polar bear was up, almost gasped.

bear made entirely from snow, so lifelike and fierce-looking that Tuk back to survey his work, pleased with what he saw. There stood a polar He finished just as the sky was beginning to brighten. He stood the right size, Tuk took out his knife and began carving the mound.

mound right near the tunnel entrance. When the snowbank was just silently so as not to wake the bear, Tuk began to pack snow into a huge Tuk stood up slowly and looked all around him. Then moving little carving knife and crept out of the igloo.

idea forming in his mind, Tuk quietly got dressed. He picked up his With an

That night, the moonlight streaming in through the ice window woke Tuk. He looked out and saw the polar bear some distance away, lying fast asleep.




wait one more day, so that the bear might leave on its own. "Either that or we'll end up starving." But Tuk persuaded his father to "We shall have to try and kill him," said Tuk's father one morning. them to eat. Still the bear circled the igloo.

Day after day the family waited until there was no food left for The polar bear was still there the next morning and all the next bear to leave.

Tuk's father could do nothing, as all the spears and knives lay scattered outside on the ice. The family had no choice but to wait for the polar





so he crawled feet-first back into the igloo tunnel to wait. Sure enough, minutes later, the bear awoke and stretched and moved sleepily over toward the igloo. But when it spied the snow bear, it reared up on its hind legs in surprise. This was the moment Tuk had been waiting for.

As swift as a snow owl dropping from the sky to capture its prey, Tuk leapt to his feet and threw himself at the bear, plunging his carving knife deep into the animal's chest. The creature howled in pain, swiping at Tuk with one paw, but not before Tuk was able to strike again. The bear let out one last roar, then collapsed in a heap.

The commotion had woken Tuk's father, who scrambled out of the igloo tunnel just in time to watch the polar bear fall to the ground. He smiled at Tuk, who was already carving up the dead animal for their first meal in days.

"From now on, you shall be known as Tuk the Hunter," his father said and proudly hugged his son.

