



# *What the Eskimo Believes*

A Treasury Of Eskimo Tales

North American

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*Intermediate*  
*7 min read*

## HOW MEN WERE CREATED

The first human beings who appeared on the Diomed Islands were a man and a woman who came down from the sky. These two lived on the island for a long time, but had no children.

At last the man took some ivory from a walrus and carved out five images from it. Then he took some wood and carved five more images, and set all of them aside. The next morning the ten images had turned into people. Those from the ivory dolls were men, hardy and brave; those from the wood were women, soft and timid.

From these ten people came the inhabitants of the islands.

## THE FLOOD

In the first days that people can remember there was a flood which covered all the earth except one very high peak in the middle. The water rose up from the sea and covered all the land except the top of this mountain, and the only animals that were not drowned were a few that went up this mountain. A few people escaped by going into their boats and living on the fish they caught until the water subsided.

After the waters lowered, these people went to live upon the mountains, and when the land was dry they came down to the coast. The animals also came down and eventually the earth was refilled with animals and people.

It was during the flood that the waves and currents of water cut the land into hollows and ridges. Then the water ran back into the sea leaving the mountains and valleys as they are today. All the Eskimo along the northern part of North America have heard their old people tell of the flood.

There are reindeer which came from the sky and which have teeth like dogs. They were once common and anyone could see them, but now only the priests can see them. They live on the plains, and have a large hole through the body back of the shoulders. If the people, who can see them, mistake them for common reindeer and shoot at them, the arrow falls harmless, for no ordinary weapon can kill them.

The Aurora Borealis is a group of boys playing football. Sometimes they use the skull of a walrus for the ball. The swaying movement of the lights shows that the players are struggling with each other and tugging back and forth. If the Aurora fades away and you utter a low whistle, the boys will come back as if answering to applause.

The Milky Way is the snow that fell from the Raven's snowshoes when he walked across the sky, during one of his journeys while he was creating the inhabitants of earth.

From Puget Sound at the northern border of the United States all along the coast to Bering Strait, both Indians and Eskimo believe that the eagle, the raven, the goose, and perhaps any bird, can push up its beak making it the visor of a cap and thus become a man, and that by pulling it down he can become a bird again.

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