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Stories of the Amautalik: Fantastic Beings from Inuit Myths and Legends by N. Christopher

Sandy Campbell

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Abstract

Christopher, Neil. *Stories of the Amautalik: Fantastic Beings from Inuit Myths and Legends*. Trans. Louise Flaherty. Illus. Larry MacDougall. Iqaluit, Nunavut: Inhabit Media, 2009. Print.

The End Notes for this book tell us that in “the isolated hills, under the ice of the sea, and in the darkness of the deep ocean, strange beings wait for lone travelers or careless children to make a mistake”. An amautalik is one such strange creature. These are the giant, disgusting ogresses of Inuit mythology who capture and eat children.

This volume contains two stories, each of a different kind of amautalik. The first has a basket of slimy driftwood on her back, lined with maggoty, rancid seaweed. The second has a huge amauti (a coat with a pouch for carrying children).

The two stories are similar. Both are cautionary tales, teaching children of the dangers of straying too far away from supervising adults. In both stories, one of the children does not have parents present to protect them and has been bullied in the community. In each case, the inattentive children are captured and taken away by the amautalik. In "The Hungry Amautalik and the Restless Children", the child who has been bullied uses the old knowledge of her shaman grandfather to gain freedom. In "The Orphan and the Amautalik", the orphan outwits the amautalik, by pretending that his toe, poking out of his worn out boot is a monster that will eat her.

The first story is much longer than the second and there are many more images of the first amautalik. Larry MacDougall's somber paintings portray the ogress's glee while tying the children to a stake and her rage when she discovers that they are gone. The second amautalik is more cadaverous-looking and frightening.

This book is an English translation of the 2007 Inuktitut volume *Amautaliup miksaanut unikkaat* and is also available as an English/Inuktitut tumble book. Originally these stories were told by elders to children, so the language would have been at a child's level. However, this translation, although it is intended as children's literature, has a reading level of about Grade 10. In spite of that, the book is still a valuable addition for school and public library collections.

Highly recommended: 4 out of 4 stars

Reviewer: Sandy Campbell

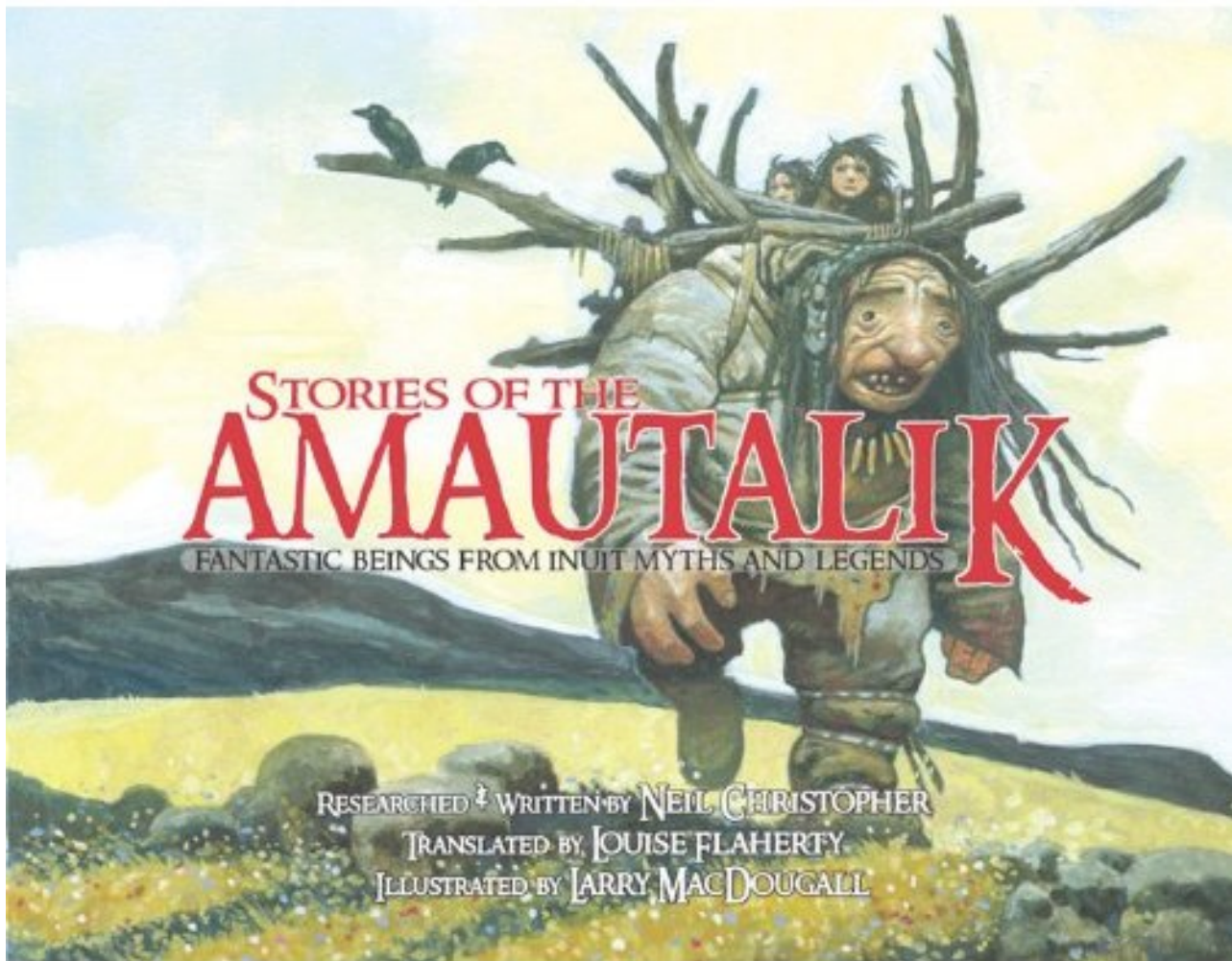
Sandy is a Health Sciences Librarian at the University of Alberta, who has written hundreds of book reviews across many disciplines. Sandy thinks that sharing books with children is one of the greatest gifts anyone can give.

Author Biography

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[1](#) [2](#) [3](#) [4](#) [5](#) [6](#) [7](#) [8](#) [9](#) [>](#) [>>](#)

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