



According to lore, a giant catfish named Namazu is buried beneath Japan. When the fish moves its feelers or its tail, the earth quakes. (Wikimedia Commons)

Namazu, the Earthshaker

Buried beneath Japan is a giant catfish named Namazu. The god Kashima keeps Namazu still with the help of a giant stone placed on the fish's head. But when Kashima slips, Namazu can move its feelers or its tail, causing the ground above to move.

Science: Japan, which sits at the junction of several tectonic plates, is home to volcanoes and is criss-crossed by seismic faults, making it the number one country for earthquakes—no giant catfish necessary. Catfish also figure into Japanese myth in another way: The fish are supposedly able to predict earthquakes. Decades of research has failed to find any link between catfish behavior and earthquakes, however, and the country now relies on a sophisticated early warning system that detects seismic waves and sends messages to people so they can take actions, such as slowing trains, before the worst of the shaking arrives.

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