

Dwarf, Magical Little Person — Sungcuk

MAANI TANG'RTAAN'ITUKUT SUNGCUNEK. - WE NEVER SEE ANY (MAGICAL) DWARVES AROUND HERE.



The Alutiiq world is full of magical beings—giants who transform themselves by spitting, people who live on the smell of meat, wily sea monsters, enormous man-worms, evil shaman’s helpers with pointed heads, and dwarves. All of these creatures were thought to inhabit the earth and interact with people. Dwarves, or “little people,” are the best known. These tiny, hairy, knee-high men with loud voices were said to be exceptionally strong. They could kill animals by pointing at them and lived in their own small villages with miniature houses and boats.

Dwarves were often helpful to people in trouble and brought luck to hunters who treated them kindly. Elders remember leaving scraps of food for little people to eat and note that if you met a dwarf, you would be lucky for life.

A legend recorded by French anthropologist Alphonse Pinart tells of two men who secured their hunting luck by caring for two dwarves. The hunters went on a kayak trip and were overtaken by fog. They heard two loud voices and came upon a tiny kayak with two little men. They took these men into their kayak, which caused the fog to disappear. They took the dwarves home and cared for them and had good luck in hunting thereafter.

Because Alutiiq people believe that every object in the universe has a human-like spirit—an actual person inside of it—some people conclude that dwarves are spirits awaiting reincarnation.

Photo: Model kayak with miniature paddlers, gift of Perry Eaton.