

Monster — Waawaq

WAAWAM TUUCIQAATEN. – THE MONSTER IS GOING TO GET YOU.



Image: The Suirliq. Block print by Jordan Norquist, AM1001

The Alutiiq world is full of magical creatures and monsters. There are people who turn into evil spirits, evil whales, lake monsters, giant worms, killer snakes, and enormous kayak-eating octopuses. One of the scariest creatures is the *suirliq*, a flesh-eating monster. One Alutiiq legend tells of a being that is half human and half sea monster covered in shells and kelp. The monster is said to emerge from the ocean at low tide and feast on human flesh. The smell of kelp warns you that the *suirliq* is coming!

According to the legend, Ukreq, a mean man, was intentionally abandoned in his village. Everyone else moved away to avoid him. Afraid of the *suirliq*, Ukreq put a large rock over the door of his sod house. One night, as he sat singing and drumming by the light of many oil lamps, the *suirliq* appeared. As planned, the rock fell on the creature and killed it. Ukreq chopped the *suirliq* into many pieces. When people returned to the village, they were surprised to see Ukreq alive. He invited him to the *qasgiq*—community house to tell his story. He offered to serve food and the people agreed. Ukreq took his revenge by feeding the villagers piece of the *suirliq*. Everyone died!

More generally, Alutiiq speakers use the term *waawaq* for any monster. This word means a bad thing or a boogie man. People use it to admonish naughty children—watch out or the *waawaq* will get you! An older word, *caraayak*, means an awful or evil thing. Speakers use it to discuss both monsters and apparitions. For example, in the 18th century people used *caraayak* to describe the fiery figure of a dead shaman flying through the sky.