

'RAINMAKERS'; TWO LITTLE ESKIMOS AND THE FORBIDDEN GAMES

By Howard Rock

"I wish that rain would stop," said Punnik, dejectedly.
 "And you say that after you made it rain?" Punek said with disgust.
 "Don't blame me. What you did probably caused it."
 "You was first so you're the cause of it. You—!"
 "Punek, I think we both made it rain," said Punnik with a sudden smile.

He turned swiftly and wrapped his right arm around Punek's neck and wrestled him goodnaturedly.
 Even then, each of the boys secretly thought what each did must have had a double effect because the downpour of rain was intense.

Inseparable Friends

The two boys were inseparable friends. They had known one another ever since they could remember. Punnik was the younger of the two. He was ten years old and Punek was eleven.

Their friendship had come about quite naturally because their parents had been lifelong friends. Tulugak and his wife, Ione, were Punnik's parents and Kunalook and Niquawana were Punek's. Their fathers had built their ice igloos side by side and each boy felt at home in either house.

Fair Day

The day, before the rain, had been fair with partly cloudy skies. The wind blew moderately from the east. It was latter part of August and the air had a tang of the coming fall.

Under this atmosphere, the huge village of Ipiutak lay sprawled by the south beach of the Tasipuk (Big Lagoon) stretching southeast for some four miles. 2,000 people lived there. The year was about 2,000 years ago.

The boys had been playing around the little lagoon just west of the big one. It was close to their houses. Here they learned to skip rocks on the water and they could do this sport more superbly than most boys their age and older.

The Race

They climbed up the bank and walked on hard ground.

"Punek, see that high mound over there?" Punnik pointed. "I'll race you to see who gets to it first."
 "That's too short a distance. Let's race around the little lagoon instead."

"I didn't mean that kind of a race!" Punnik said impatiently. "I mean let's roll on the ground to it and I think I can beat you."

"You're too little to beat me, little boy," Punek said mockingly even though the younger boy was only an inch shorter than he was.
 "All right, you fat aivik (walrus)! Come on, let's go!"

They aligned themselves vertically in relation to the mound which was about a hundred feet away. Punnik made a false start.

"You dumb nachig (seal), you're already trying to cheat!" Punek reprimanded.

"I'm not trying to cheat. You jerked and made me start."

"You jerked and made me start—you jerked and made me start!" Punek mocked. "Now let's get ready—let's go!"

They began to roll towards the mound as fast as they could. They had to check every few moments to see if they were going in the right direction.

Dizzy Contest

"I'm getting dizzy but I'm going to beat you, Punek," Punnik laughed.

"I'm getting dizzy too but you're not going to beat me."

"I'm ahead of you, Punek!"

As they rolled, the world around them began to undulate violently. When it seemed to sway toward them, they could hardly roll against it. When it swayed away they rolled faster. When they reached the

mound finally, it was Punnik who had gotten there first.

Laughing triumphantly, the younger boy shouted, "See Punek, I told you I'd beat you!"

"It's not fair. You got your feet tangled up in my face a little ways back," the older boy complained.

"I did not."

"You did too and I'm going to knock you down!" Punek threatened.

He struggled to get up. Seeing him, Punek also tried, as soon as the younger boy got on his feet, he staggered backwards and fell to the ground. Punek shot past, staggered to his right and tumbled head over heels over the low bank of the lagoon hollering as he fell.

Punik rolled over on his belly and crawled to the edge of the bank. He broke into a paroxysm of laughter as he saw his friend spreadeagled on the sand face down. Punek raised his head slowly, furiously spitting sand out of his mouth. Hearing his friend's laughter, the older boy shouted, "Wait till this dizziness passes. I'm going to stuff your head in the sand!"

"You know you can't catch me, you fat aivik," needed Punnik. He was confident because he could run a little faster than the older boy. He stood up getting ready to flee if his friend started chasing him. His dizziness was almost gone as his friend scrambled up the bank.
 "Wait till I catch you—you!" Punek menaced.

The Pursuit

The pursuit began along the bank with taunting remarks from the younger boy. As he ran, Punnik began to laugh. The mental picture of Punek falling wildly and his furious spitting of the sand out of his mouth persisted in his mind.

The youngster was laughing so hard his running speed was effected. His pursuer gained on him and caught up, Punek grabbed him by his shoulders and they fell heavily on a grassy mound. Both grunted with the impact but they were not hurt.

"Did you say I wouldn't catch you—you—qupilug (worm)?" Punek said vaulting as he kneaded Punnik's face in the grass.

"Stop that, you fat aivik! You wouldn't have caught me if I hadn't been laughing," Punnik panted.

"I'd have caught you anyway if it took me the rest of the day."

The older boy stopped kneading his friend's face and they became quiet for a moment. Punnik broke the silence, "Punek, did you get a big mouthful of sand when you fell?"

"Well, I was too dizzy and busy and I had my mouth open. The beach came up real fast before I could close my mouth."

Punik snickered and then broke into a stream of laughter.

"Stop that, you qupilug! You wouldn't think it was so funny if it had been you. Besides you probably would have cried. Stop it!"

"I wouldn't have cried either. I'm too big to cry, you know that!" Punnik retorted.

"You would have too."

"I wouldn't."

With that exchange, the boys began to tussle. They soon tired of it and just lolled on the grassy mound.

"Let's go sit on the beach," Punek said.

"You go sit. I'm going to rest here awhile."

"You poor little boy, you're so weak you have to rest. Look at me. I'm not even tired."

"I'm not tired, Punek. I just want to relax."

Laughing derisively, the older boy jumped up and went to the beach. Punek rolled lazily on the grass. Even in the approaching fall, some of the grass was still green. The boy took hold of a green reed by the tassle and pulled it out of

its jacket. It slid out quite easily.

He pinched off the tender root end. He took one strand of tassle and inserted its tiny stem into the tubular end of the reed. He pulled up and forward on it and made an almost invisible slit about two and a half inches long.

The boy looked askance toward the lagoon where Punek was hidden by the drop of the bank. He could see the splash of the pebbles his friend was throwing on the water.

The Whistle

He scrutinized the reed in his hands apprehensively—almost furtively. He slowly put the slit end into his mouth and hesitated. Should he or should he not? Feeling a little guilty, he worked up enough courage and decided that he would.

He blew into the reed with such effort that his cheeks ballooned on each side of his mouth. A clear, shrill whistle emanated from it. It was a sweet and plaintive musical sound and it resounded with enough volume that Punek heard it as soon as it issued forth. The older boy bounded up the bank.

"Punik, you crazy fool, you shouldn't have done that! Now it's going to rain for sure tomorrow. Don't you want to play around in nice weather?"

Punik began to feel guiltier. He was at a loss for words. He looked at his friend with a sheepish look on his face. He had defied a superstition. He did it and there was

nothing he could do to undo it.

"Do you really want it to rain?" Punek asked bitterly.

"No Punek, I don't want it to rain."

"Then why did you blow that thing?"

"I don't know. I just wanted to do it. Well anyway, how can that little whistle make it rain?"

"Have you forgotten what our parents and other people told us that it would rain if we did that?" Punek reminded.

"Yes, I remember."

The older boy stamped his foot in disgust.

"Don't be angry, Punek. I really didn't mean to do it," Punnik said, his voice low and small. "But—anyway—do you think that the reed whistle would really and truly make it rain?"

"Well, that's what people say but I don't really see how it could. Just the same, you shouldn't have done it," Punek said, showing signs of relenting.

Pintail Ducks

"Look, Punek! Kurugaks (pintail ducks) are coming this way. Let's get down the bank and see if we can hit them with rocks."

The boys jumped down to make themselves less conspicuous and to get pebbles for weapons. The ducks came low over the beach. Just as they came over, the youngsters threw the pebbles. Punek's rock brushed the wing of one of them.

"Did you see that, Punek?" Pun-

nik said excitedly. "If I had thrown a little higher, I would have gotten him!"

"You was just lucky you came that close."

"I wasn't either. I aimed better than you did."

In his young mind, Punek began to think that things were going wrong for him. He sat down abruptly on the sand close to the edge of the water. Punnik sensed that something was wrong and sat down close to his friend. He put a reassuring arm around Punek's neck and the latter pushed him away.

"I don't think you want to play anymore, Punek. Let's go home." "You go home."

"Well, if you really want me to go—"

Punik was disturbed about the rift that had developed. He turned slowly, got up and started to walk up the beach. After a few steps, he heard a sound that stopped him right in his tracks.

Showers of Sand

He looked back quickly. Punek had thrown a handful of sand into the air and it was dropping into the water in rapid series of tiny splashes. The sound was not unlike the sound of large drops of rain.

"PUNEK! Do you know what you're doing?"

The older boy looked at Punnik and laughed secretly. He took another handful of sand and threw it hard into the air.

The younger boy didn't know whether to laugh with his friend or not. He chuckled a little.

"Now it's really going to rain isn't it, Punek?"

"How can a little thing like throwing sand in the water make it rain? It doesn't even look like it's going to rain. There's even some blue sky up there."

Punik and Punek discussed what they had done and decided that things like blowing a whistle through a grass reed and throwing sand in the water were kind of silly things anyway. How could such things cause rain?

However, without knowing what the other was thinking about, each one of them couldn't get rid of the feeling that he had defied a superstition. Without trying to show it, each boy had a feeling of apprehension and wondered what will happen.

The Rude Awakening

The boys went home to their families, ate, and went to bed. After sleeping fitfully, each woke up to a sound which to them was awesome and sobering. Large drops of rain were slamming on the oograk gut skylights of their igloos!

"This is very strange!" each boy thought. "How can a tiny whistle from a grass reed and the splash of sand in the water make it rain?"

The boys dressed quickly not knowing what the other was doing. Punek was first to finish and he went next door right away.

"I was just going over to see you, Punek," Punnik said, suppressing his excitement.

"Can I see you out at the entrance?" the older boy asked just above a whisper.

Noting the strange behavior of the boys, Tulugak said, "You're not thinking of going out to play in this kind of weather, are you?"

"No father, Punnik answered. 'Punek just wants to show me something.'"

They went out to the hallway and then peeked out of the entrance. They looked at one another in awed silence.

"Punik, do you think we really made it rain?"

"I don't know," the youngster answered plaintively, "but it sure is raining hard and we won't be able to play out today."