



## The Journals Of Knud Rasmussen

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*Dirs/scr: Zacharis Kunuk, Norman Cohn. Can-Den. 2006. 112mins.*

**The combination of an opening night slot in Toronto and the pressure of following up on their justly heralded debut *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner* - which won Cannes' Camera d'Or in 2001 - provide film-makers Zacharis Kunuk and Norman Cohn with a searing spotlight for their new feature *The Journals Of Knud Rasmussen*. But while it avoids the bane of the "terrible twos," their second work nevertheless lacks the novelty and cohesion of the production that brought them to prominence.**

The sweeping saga of an Inuit tribe's first encounter with the white man in the 1920s is a slow starter that ultimately packs a devastating conclusion. Nonetheless, commercial response and sales in niche play won't be as potent and critical support is apt to be lukewarm rather than embracing.

The title itself is misleading; suggesting that the real life Arctic explorer and ethnographer would minimally be setting the narrative agenda. At that point in his career, Rasmussen was involved in his longest expedition with the hopes of doing extensive historical and cultural research among First Canadians.

Long before Rasmussen and his team arrive we are introduced to Aava (Pakak Innuksuk), a shaman and his daughter Apak (Leah Angutimarik). It is a relationship fraught with tension; not unlike father-daughter tales in other cultures and climates. She has never fully recovered from the tragic death of her first husband and retains spiritual contact with him much to the chagrin of a new spouse.

Aava's dilemma is more difficult to pinpoint. He appears to be in the throes of a crisis of faith: it may simply be a matter of age and experience and it may also be accelerated by his daughter's situation. One is also led to believe that the tom-tom network has communicated the arrival of Europeans in distant villages; their ships, weapons and the religion they call Christianity.

There are echoes of the earlier film in *The Journals Of Knud Rasmussen* that come with the territory literally and in the natural, largely unschooled performances of the native cast. Cohn - who did not take a directing credit on the earlier film - again serves as cinematographer and employs digital cameras and a deft balance of poetry and cinema verite. The environment is like painting on a white canvas with the denizens adding striking color and the wind an essential part of the soundtrack.

The earlier film by its very nature was allegoric and the decision not to specify its era underlined its universality. This time there's more rumination than momentum with long sections in which tribal elders appear to wrestle with both the obscure and significant incursions on their daily life. There's also considerable time devoted to Inuit songs and chants that were a significant aspect of Rasmussen's later work, and the film-makers even venture into National Film Board of Canada terrain with a section devoted to how to build an igloo.

When it appears that the yarn's disparate strands are unrelated and unfocused, the film-maker exacts an extraordinary sleight of hand and Aava begins to preach a form of Christianity that incorporates tenets of native beliefs and faith. It occurs so quickly and organically it cannot help but leave one breathless. What translated as random and sometime anecdotal crystallises into major tragedy and one's early reservations are largely reduced to petty carping.

Production companies/backers  
Igloodik Isuma Productions  
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