



**Canada's Official Selection – Foreign Language Oscar®
6 Genie Awards**

**Best Picture, Best Director, Best Screenplay
Best Original Score, Best Editing, Claude Jutra**

ATANARJUAT

THE FAST RUNNER

A film by Zacharias Kunuk

Running time: 172 min.



Winner Caméra d'or

Un Certain Regard – Official Selection – Cannes 2001

Winner Guardian Award for First Directors

2001 Edinburgh International Film Festival

Winner Toronto-City Award for Best Canadian Feature Film

2001 Toronto International Film Festival

Winner Grand Prix of the Flemish Community for Best Film

28th Flanders International Film Festival – Ghent

Winner Special Jury Prize and the Prix du Public

Festival International du nouveau Cinema et des nouveaux Medias de Montreal 2001

CTV Best of Fest Award

Next Fest 2001 - Digital Motion Picture Festival

Best Film

2001 ImagineNATIVE International Media Art Festival

Critical Praise for *ATANARJUAT – THE FAST RUNNER*

"Mysterious, bawdy, emotionally intense, and replete with virtuoso throat singing, this three-hour movie is engrossing from first image to last, so devoid of stereotype and cosmic in its vision it could suggest the rebirth of cinema."

Jim Hoberman, Village Voice

"Nothing less than a complete revelation and reinvention of cinematic form.... a definite 'must-see'."

Katherine Monk, Vancouver Sun

"An astonishing epic film"
Roger Ebert, Chicago Sun-Times

"A genuine delight.... a spectacular achievement"

Andrew Pulver, The Guardian

"Ravishing"
Dennis Lim, Village Voice

"A milestone...a fascinating cultural document"

Liam Lacey, The Globe and Mail

"Un film d'une singulière beauté"

Jean-Michel Frodon, Le Monde

"The locations are unsparingly harsh and beautiful. The camera work is stunning. The performances, all by Inuits, have a simple power that strikes us straight between the eyes, as fast and true as an arrow"

Nigel Andrews, The Financial Times of London

"Lyrical, fablelike"
A.O. Scott, New York Times

"Thousand year old tale of festering evil on the frozen tundra should find a warm welcome worldwide"

Lisa Nesselson, Variety

"Enthralling... The movie's ritual world is astonishing"

Brian D. Johnson, Maclean's

"Creates another planet to unfamiliar eyes.... One of the most erotic Canadian films ever"

Katrina Onstad, The National Post

"Un plaisir rare, celui de la totale nouveauté"

Thomas Sotinel, Le Monde

"Fills the screen with stunning images bathed in pink-blue northern light, and performances of beautiful spontaneity"

SF Said, London Daily Telegraph

Igloolik Isuma Productions presents
In co-production with National Film Board of Canada

ATANARJUAT

THE FAST RUNNER

director	Zacharias KUNUK
screenplay	Paul APAK ANGILIRQ
photography	Norman COHN
editing	Zacharias KUNUK, Norman COHN, Marie-Christine SARDA
music	Chris CRILLY
art direction	James UNGALAAQ
costumes	Micheline AMMAQ, Atuat AKKITIRQ
producers	Paul APAK ANGILIRQ, Norman COHN, Zacharias KUNUK
exec producer NFB	Sally BOCHNER
producer NFB	Germaine YING GEE WONG
atanarjuat	Natar UNGALAAQ
atuat	Sylvia IVALU
oki	Peter-Henry ARNATSIAQ
puja	Lucy TULUGARJUK
panikpak	Madeline IVALU
qulitalik	Pauloosie QULITALIK
sauri	Eugene IPKARNAK
amaqjuaq	Pakkak INNUKSHUK

Produced with the participation of Canadian Television Fund, created by the Government of Canada and the cable industry, Telefilm Equity Investment Programme, CTF License Fee Programme, and Channel 24 Igloolik, Vision TV, Aboriginal Peoples Television Network and the Government of Canada Canadian Film Production Tax Credit Program.

SYNOPSIS

Evil in the form of an unknown shaman divides a small community of nomadic Inuit, upsetting its balance and spirit.

Twenty years pass. Two brothers emerge to challenge the evil order: Amaqjuaq, the Strong One, and Atanarjuat, the Fast Runner. Atanarjuat wins the hand of the lovely Atuat away from the boastful son of the camp leader, Oki, who vows to get even. Oki ambushes the brothers in their sleep, killing Amaqjuaq, as Atanarjuat miraculously escapes running naked over the spring sea ice.

But can he ever escape the cycle of vengeance left behind?

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

"*Atanarjuat* is a universal story with emotions people all over the world can understand. It is also totally Inuit: a story we all heard as children, told and acted by Inuit. We show how Inuit lived hundreds of years ago and what their problems were, starting with their marriage problems. What happens when a woman is promised to one man but breaks a taboo and marries another? We show how our ancestors dressed, how they handled their dog teams, how they argued and laughed and went through hard times - how they confronted evil and fought back. They *had* to get along, to work things out no matter what. This is the story we are passing on to others, just like it was passed on to us."

ROOTS OF THE PROJECT

Atanarjuat (The Fast Runner) is based on an ancient Inuit legend, set in the Arctic at the dawn of the first millennium. For countless generations, Igloolik elders have kept the legend of *Atanarjuat* alive through oral history to teach young Inuit the dangers of setting personal desire above the needs of the group.

In the old days powerful shamans lead small groups of nomadic Inuit. Women bore elaborate facial tatoos and beautifully braided hair. They used curved women's knives with blades made of bone and stone. Men constructed sleds from caribou antlers and sinew. People wore clothing made from caribou, wolf, seal, and even bird skins. And of course, families slept in snow houses, or *igloos*, and stone houses, kept warm by carefully tended seal oil lamps. Created by Inuit, *Atanarjuat* presents these details for the first time with unique authenticity yet the film is a powerful drama, not a documentary. On the contrary, *Atanarjuat* demystifies the exotic, otherworldly aboriginal stereotype by telling a powerful, universal story – a drama set in motion by conflicts and emotions that have surfaced in virtually every culture known to man.

"When missionaries came," explains director Zacharias Kunuk, "they proclaimed shamanism was the devil's work. But they didn't look into what the shamans felt, or how they gave life to the dying, visited the dead, found trails over land and underground or took to flight through the air. When the missionaries forced their religion on us, storytelling and drum dancing were almost banned. Our film *Atanarjuat* is one way of bringing back lost traditions. I have never witnessed shamanism. I have only heard about it. One way of making it visible is to film it."

LOCATION

Igloolik is a community of 1,200 people located on a small island in the north Baffin region of the Canadian Arctic with archeological evidence of 4,000 years of continuous habitation. One star of *Atanarjuat* is the land itself, the sense of space, sky and unique arctic light in all seasons. Filmed entirely on location on the sea-ice, sprawling tundra and rocky flatlands around Igloolik, the austere, evocative beauty of the landscape is used to underscore the importance of cooperation to Inuit families in their nomadic lifestyle.

ART OF STORYTELLING

Inuit storytelling is one of the world's oldest living art forms. For four millennia Igloolik's nomadic ancestors passed all their knowledge, culture, philosophy and values from generation to generation without a written language. While other cultures excelled at building temples or empires, making money or waging war, Inuit learned to tell really good stories: entertaining and suspenseful enough to keep listeners spellbound, carrying complex cultural information hidden in multiple layers of meaning.

For Inuit viewers *Atanarjuat* is part of this continuous stream of oral history, adapted to the film medium for future generations. For a world audience, however, *Atanarjuat* marks the first time Inuit storytelling is widely accessible to others through a sub-titled film. Inspired by this ancient tradition, the film-making style sought to be compellingly visual, quietly intelligent and surprisingly funny. True to Inuit storytelling practice, where actions really *do* speak louder than words, the closer you watch, the more you can see.

Atanarjuat's originator and scriptwriter, Paul Apak Angilirq, drew on this rich oral tradition to achieve the world's first screenplay written in Inuktitut. Apak first recorded eight elders telling their own versions of the legend as it had been passed down to them. Then Apak led Isuma's team of five writers to combine these into an Inuktitut screenplay with an English version for outside readers. Elders commented on every stage of the scriptwriting process for cultural accuracy, sharpening language and explaining relations and motivations not immediately apparent in today's more modernized culture.

"[The film] tells a story, a legend, that is right at the deep roots of Inuit culture," Paul Apak Angilirq explained before his untimely death of cancer in 1998, "It works to preserve both knowledge and traditions. We tried to go back as far as possible with the language, to use the old language. By taking the time to learn more about the culture, we wound up going far beyond what we had expected."

INSIDE THE ACTION WITH CAST AND CREW

Atanarjuat uses an all-Inuit cast entirely from Igloolik, mixing experienced actors with mostly first-time performers. *Atanarjuat's* 90% Inuit technical crew also mixed experience with first-time trainees learning skills needed to build a Nunavut-based film industry. A small team of southern professionals were involved in the pre-production process, training local Inuit in make-up, sound recording, continuity, stunts and special effects. Several Southerners were also involved in post-production, including one of the editors, the music composer, and foley artists.

To get top performances from cast and crew the filmmakers created an Inuit 'culture of production' characterized by good humor, fearlessness, patience and flexibility. On location in the Igloolik region over a six-month shoot in 1999, cast and crew camped in dwellings and conditions similar to those of the characters in the film –living on the tundra as their ancestors had hundreds of

years ago. For a film location, this reversed the forbidding production stereotype of extreme (and expensive!) arctic conditions, with an Inuit-style sense of community.

A New Yorker by birth, cinematographer and DP Norman Cohn has experienced both Southern and Inuit production styles. "Conventional film-making has a hierarchy like the military," he explains. "Every relationship is vertical, every individual knows exactly who is one notch ahead of him or her or one notch below. Inuit aren't like that. Nobody ever salutes. Inuit process is very horizontal. We made our film in an Inuit way, through consensus and collaboration. It takes longer but people feel more natural and relaxed and the result is visible on the screen."

For first-time actor Sylvia Ivalu, who plays the female lead of Atuat, making *Atanarjuat* "was exciting and also frustrating. I never imagined how many takes we would need to get one scene right!" Raised in an oral culture rooted in the traditions of storytelling, Ivalu found it natural to identify with her character's emotions. "I know we were just acting," she adds quietly, "but you could actually feel it. I was thinking how hard life would be with murders like this, and the revenge. When you lose someone, a person who supports you for life, for hunting, for food, thinking about when he's gone... I couldn't stop crying."

Atanarjuat was shot on wide screen (16:9) digital betacam, transferred to 35mm film through a 'smooth motion' process with true film resolution at Digital Film Group, Vancouver. The film's visual strategy was designed to heighten the audience's sense of *being there*, despite the exotic locale. "Even state-of-the-art digital cameras can take you places a film camera could never go," explains DP Norman Cohn. "We wanted the viewer to feel *inside* the action, looking out, rather than outside looking in. This lets people forget how far away they really are, and to identify with our story and characters as if they were just like us."

Atanarjuat was co-produced through National Film Board of Canada's Aboriginal Filmmaking Program. Established in 1996, the Program provides designated funds for Native filmmakers and continues the NFB's long-standing commitment to reach out to communities traditionally underrepresented in Canadian film production.

ANCIENT CRAFTS

Local artists and elders handmade all costumes, props, and sets for the film drawing both on Inuit oral history and traditional knowledge, and the journals of Admiral Wm. Parry's British Naval expedition to Igloolik in 1822-23. Using sketches from Parry's journals and elders' memories, the filmmakers reconstructed the authentic look and feel of nomadic Inuit life pre-dating first contact with European cultures. This artistic research deliberately re-appropriates Inuit knowledge from Southern museums and books bringing traditional skills and technologies back home to the Inuit of Igloolik.

Prop-makers, seamstresses and set designers put into practice or re-learned traditional skills to make hunting implements, household objects and dogsleds from bone, stone, antler and ivory, and kayaks, tents and costumes from animal skins. Like previous Isuma productions, *Atanarjuat* played a significant role in maintaining these traditions as living knowledge for future generations.

Under the direction of head seamstress and elder, Atuat Akkitirq, and costume manager, Micheline Ammaq, a team of highly-skilled local seamstresses created the distinctive clothing for each character. In the murder scene, for example, Oki wears a parka made of king eider duck skins that even floats in water. The traditional woman's parka, or *amauti*, has a deep hood at the back to carry babies and children. The *amauti* Atanarjuat gives Atuat at their reunion is made of caribou skin and features decorative fringes and an intricate overlay design on the front.

Head prop-maker and artistic director, James Ungalaaq, an internationally renowned sculptor whose work is in museum collections of Inuit art worldwide, led the team of local artisans who built the props and sets.

ABOUT THE CAST

NATAR UNGALAAQ (Atanarjuat)

Natar Ungalaaq is an actor, filmmaker and well-known Inuit sculptor whose artwork is in many major collections of Inuit art worldwide. Before playing the lead role of Atanarjuat, Natar played major roles in other Canadian and American films, including *Kabloonak*, *Glory and Honor* and *Frostfire*

SYLVIA IVALU (Atuat)

Sylvia Ivalu makes her film debut as Atuat, Atanarjuat's wife. Mother of three small children Sylvia is a secretary for the Government of Nunavut in Igloolik.

PETER HENRY ARNATSIAQ (Oki)

Peter Henry Arnatsiaq is Oki, Atanarjuat's lifelong rival and enemy. Living in Igloolik as a full-time hunter, *Atanarjuat* marks Peter Henry's first professional acting experience.

LUCY TULUGARJUK (Puja)

Lucy Tulugarjuk plays Puja, Atanarjuat's saucy second wife. She also makes her film debut in *Atanarjuat*. Mother of two small children Lucy is currently enrolled in a management training program in Ottawa.

MADELINE IVALU (Panikpak)

Madeline Ivalu plays Panikpak, the older female lead, whose leadership is instrumental in regaining harmony for the divided community. Madeline is a well-known artist and seamstress, and a founding member of Igloolik's Arnait Video Productions (Women's Video Workshop), a collective of Igloolik women making video from a women's point of view since 1991.

PAUL QULITALIK (Qulitalik)

Paul Qulitalik plays his own namesake, Qulitalik, who aids his sister Panikpak to restore order in Igloolik. Chairman and founding partner of Igloolik Isuma Productions, Qulitalik has acted in every Isuma film since 1989 and brings his experience of the old life to his role as Cultural Director of the team.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

IGLOOLIK ISUMA PRODUCTIONS: An Inuit-style Production Team

Igloolik Isuma Productions Inc. was incorporated in January 1990 as Canada's first Inuit independent production company by founding shareholders Zacharias Kunuk, president; Paul Apak Angilirq, vice-president; Paul Qulitalik, chairman; and Norman Cohn, secretary-treasurer. Paul Apak passed away in December 1998 and his share is held by his daughter, Krista Uttak.

Isuma's owners remain its core collective production team. Their mission is to professionalize an Inuit style of community-based media production to preserve and enhance Inuit culture, create jobs in Igloolik and represent a distinctively Inuit point of view in the global communications marketplace. Since 1989 Isuma's Inuit style of drama has won awards, recognition and acclaim in Canada and sixteen countries worldwide.

BIOGRAPHIES

Producer ... Director ... Co-Writer ... Co-editor

ZACHARIAS KUNUK is producer/director of *Atanarjuat (The Fast Runner)*, his first dramatic feature film. He is also president and co-founder of Igloolik Isuma Productions Inc., Canada's first Inuit-owned independent production company. Born in a sod house on the arctic tundra in 1957, Kunuk was nine years old when his family gave up their nomadic lifestyle and settled in the new Baffin Island government town of Igloolik. In 1981, already a famous carver, Kunuk sold three sculptures in Montreal and brought home the arctic's first video camera to a community that did not yet have television. As director in the Isuma production team Kunuk's credits include the short dramas *Qaggig* (Gathering Place, 1989), *Nunaqpa* (Going Inland, 1991) *Saputi* (Fish Traps, 1993) and *Nunavut* (Our Land, 1995), and documentaries *Nipi* (Voice, 1999) and *Nanugiurutiga* (My First Bear, 2001), shown in festivals and museums in sixteen countries with personal presentations at National Gallery of Canada, New York's Museum of Modern Art, and artist-in-residencies at several Canadian universities.

Producer ... Scriptwriter

PAUL APAK ANGILIRQ (1954-1998) began his television career in 1978 as one of the first trainees in Canada's effort to develop indigenous television producers in remote Aboriginal communities. Hired at the start of Inuit Broadcasting Corporation in 1981, Apak received IBC's Special Recognition Award when he left in 1992 to become vice-president and co-founder of Igloolik Isuma Productions. An experienced adventurer, Apak filmed

two ground-breaking expeditions: *The Qidlarsuaaq Expedition* retracing by dog team a 19th century migration of Igloolik Inuit to northern Greenland; and *Through Eskimo Country*, a voyage by walrus-hide boat from Siberia to Alaska over the pre-historic migratory route through the Bering Strait. Apak wrote the Inuktitut screenplay for *Atanarjuat* but passed away from cancer in December 1998 before the film was completed.

Producer ... Cinematographer/DP ... Co-Writer ... Co-editor ... Prodn Manager

NORMAN COHN is secretary-treasurer, the fourth co-founder and the only non-Inuit on Isuma's collective ownership team. Living in Igloolik since 1985, Cohn is Isuma's director of photography in a fifteen-year collaboration with Zacharias Kunuk and Paul Apak that created Isuma's style of 're-lived' cultural drama. Before coming to Igloolik Cohn was a widely-exhibited video artist. The solo exhibition, *Norman Cohn: Portraits*, opened in 1983 at Toronto's Art Gallery of Ontario, National Gallery of Canada, Vancouver Art Gallery and other Canadian museums, and Cohn's experimental feature documentary *Quartet for Deafblind* (1987) was selected for Dokumenta 7 in Kassel, Germany. Winner of numerous Canada Council Awards and a 1990 Guggenheim Fellowship, Cohn was co-winner with Kunuk of the 1994 Bell Canada Award for Outstanding Achievement in Video Art.

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