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Atanarjuat (The Fast Runner)

Zacharias Kunuk

CANADA, 2001

172 minutes ■ Colour/35mm

Production Company: **Igloolik Isuma Productions/National Film Board of Canada**

Executive Producer: **Sally Bochner**

Producer: **Paul Apak Angilirq, Norman Cohn, Zacharias Kunuk, Germaine Ying Gee Wong**

Screenplay: **Paul Apak Angilirq**

Cinematographer: **Norman Cohn**

Editor: **Zacharias Kunuk, Norman Cohn, Marie-Christine Sarda**

Production Designer: **James Ungalaaq**

Music: **Chris Crilly**

Principal Cast: **Natar Ungalaaq, Sylvia Ivalu, Peter-Henry Arnatsiaq, Lucy Tulugarjuk, Madeline Ivalu**

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Inuit storytelling stands as one of the world's oldest art forms. For 4,000 years the Inuit have passed all their knowledge, values, philosophy and culture from generation to generation without a written language. To keep listeners spellbound, the stories are naturally entertaining and suspenseful, carrying complex cultural information hidden within multiple layers of meaning. The first feature film ever made in the Inuit language Inuktitut, *Atanarjuat (The Fast Runner)* is part of this continuous stream of oral history.

Atanarjuat, the Fast Runner, finds himself in love with the lovely Atuat. While she loves him in return, unfortunately she has been promised to Oki, the boastful and bullying son of the camp leader. When *Atanarjuat* forces the issue, he violates the carefully observed customs of the community. In a timeless story, Oki sets out to gain revenge.

Featuring an all-Inuit cast of experienced actors and first-time performers, *Atanarjuat* was shot by an almost entirely Inuit crew on location in the North Baffin region of the Canadian Arctic. Costumes, props and sets were handmade by local artists and elders, who also advised on every stage of the scriptwriting process to ensure cultural accuracy. With sleds built of caribou antlers and sinew and garments fashioned from animal pelts, the film possesses an ineffable aura of genuineness.

Winner of the immensely prestigious *Caméra d'Or* for best first feature at Cannes

this year, *Atanarjuat* is a landmark in our film history. Kunuk's direction is faultless. His rhythm is that of the Arctic and it replicates the natural unfolding of time. Norman Cohn's cinematography captures the vast expanse of sky, unique arctic light and the sprawling sea ice, tundra and rocky flatlands with austere, evocative beauty. And the storytelling is spellbinding, a fable about the individual and the community in which he must live. It carries lessons for all of us.

■ Piers Handling



Zacharias Kunuk was born in 1957 and lived a nomadic lifestyle until he was nine, when his family settled in Igloolik on Baffin Island. An internationally renowned carver (too little-known in his native Canada) with artist-in-residency posts at several Canadian universities, he has

made a number of short dramas and documentaries that have shown at festivals around the world. *Atanarjuat (The Fast Runner)* (01) is his first dramatic feature film.

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