

The Fast Runner: Filming the Legend of Atanarjuat

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The 2001 movie, *The Fast Runner*, the first feature-length film written, directed, and produced by Inuit artists and shot on location in the frozen Arctic, garnered acclaim at the Cannes Film Festival and other international fests. Reviewers such as Roger Ebert praised the film's effort to present Native people in such an accurate light and encouraged other indigenous peoples around the world to create their own films.

This book, the first in a series focusing on films made by indigenous peoples, gives the reader and filmgoer an intimate look behind the scenes of the film's genesis, the key players, and the financial and cultural challenges the producers faced. The author, an associate dean at Indiana University's School of Journalism, knows his subject matter intimately, having lived among the producers in the Arctic and written extensively about their previous projects.

The Fast Runner, starring Inuit actors speaking in their native tongue, is the dramatization of a revered 500-year-old legend about a fleet-footed Inuit named Atanarjuat, barefooted and freezing, who outruns his murderous adversaries on the frozen tundra. The film, shot in the Arctic, features a scrupulously accurate depiction of tribal life, culture, mores, igloo-building, traditional hunting methods, and marital conflicts.

Tribal legends and the close connection between the spirit world and the earth are foregrounded in the film. And the well from which the producers drew this authenticity was the population of elders, the most respected among the tribe.

"[The producers] learned from elders the ways in which people treated each other, proper forms of address, taboos and other facets of Inuit culture that shaped everyday behavior," the author writes.

The book includes a synopsis of the complex plot of the film; a bibliography, as the film has kindled the writing of numerous articles and studies about Inuit life and indigenous films; and a glossary. This will be a welcome reference book for any serious student of film studies, regardless of genre.

KARL KUNKEL (May / June 2010)

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