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A young shaman must face her first test—a trip underground to visit Kannaaluk, The One Below, who holds the answers to why a community member has become ill. Facing dark spirits and physical challenges, she must trust her mentor's teachings and learn to control her fear.

## **LONG SYNOPSIS**

*Angkuksajaujuq: The Shaman's Apprentice* is an animated adaptation of an Inuit traditional story, from the North Baffin region.

The Shaman's Apprentice tells the story of a young shaman in training who must face her first test—a trip to the underground to visit Kannaaluk, The One Below, who holds the answers to why a community member has become ill. Facing dark spirits and physical challenges, the young shaman must trust the teachings of her grandmother and mentor, Ningiuq Angakkuq, and learn to control her fear.

This is an exciting narrative to bring to a larger audience, as it is steeped in Inuit traditional beliefs and spirituality. The goal of the film is to engage a contemporary audience while ensuring the story's authenticity is preserved. Director Zacharias Kunuk and the production team worked hard to accurately represent the northern community and time period with sufficient detail. The goal was to transport the audience to another place and time in the world, and seamlessly carry them into the spirit world of Inuit traditional beliefs.

## **DIRECTOR STATEMENT – ZACHARIAS KUNUK**

This film is based on a story I heard in 1980 from an elder woman named Niviatiaq. I was interviewing her and her husband about shamanism in our Amittuq region around Igloodik, and she told me this story of how shamans would make trips to the underworld to heal the sick or find answers about a taboo that had been broken. In our traditional beliefs unexplained illnesses often came from broken taboos, when someone ate a piece of meat they were not allowed to, disrespected an animal or person, or broke a social rule. This incredible story of journeying to the underworld has stayed in my mind ever since.

Shamanism was a complex spiritual system of taboos, shamans and spirits that provided structure and guidance for Inuit living in one of the world's harshest environments. We survived sustainably in this environment by passing on our traditions and knowledge through thousands of years of oral tradition. But when Christianity came a hundred years ago, followed by forced settlement, residential schools, and the colonial school system we have now, so much of these oral teachings stopped being told. It was illegal to drum dance or to sing our songs. Our priests told us that shamanism was the work of Satan, so we stopped talking about it. Many people still feel uncomfortable talking about this, but I think now things are starting to change. The world is changing. We know now that God is not on Israel's side, Christianity is one belief system like any other, so shamanism is becoming freer as a topic now. People of my generation are becoming the elders now we can talk about these things as we try to re-learn what was hidden for so long.

Our Inuit traditional beliefs tell us that spirits are with us all the time, they are all around us, but most just can't perceive them. Every object or life form has a spirit and you have to respect them because they are as alive as us, and can harm you if you don't. 4000 years vs 100 years of Christianity - I don't believe they could have just disappeared from the land like that.

Animation was the perfect visual medium for this project, working with Taqqut was great because they are Nunavut-based like us. They have Inuk illustrators and producers, make books and children's television in Inuktitut based off Inuit legends and Inuit authors. They understood the importance of getting things right, details of the tunniit (face tattoos), the proper way to show the dog harnesses on the sled, or the regional patterns on the amauti (women's parka), everything

was considered and brought into the stop motion process. It's incredible how much work is done behind the scenes - you have to be a patient person to do stop motion!

The freedom of animation opens so many possibilities for telling these kinds of stories in the future because we have so many amazing stories waiting to be told. I see this short film simply as a tool start talking about shamanism again, to invite Inuit, especially children and younger generations, to be proud of our rich spiritual traditions and feel comfortable to explore and ask questions about shamanism. And for non-Inuit audiences to get a glimpse into a spiritual world that they're likely never heard about before.

### **ON THE ANIMATION PROCESS – EVAN DERUSHIE**

This short film was created using traditional stop-motion puppetry, a technique used by film directors like Jan Švankmajer and Henry Selick. Each set, prop and character in the film is created in miniature, then setup with a camera and lighting just like a live-action film. The poseable puppets are moved one frame at a time by an animator, who creates the moving performances of each character. But before anything was built, the film was designed in storyboard form, which is where Zacharias Kunuk turned his story into the blueprints for the film. From here, a team of set, prop and puppet builders went to work creating the miniature world of *The Shaman's Apprentice*. The costumes were made using scaled down traditional Inuit clothing patterns, and all of the materials were chosen to look culturally accurate while enduring the slow production of stop-motion. For example, instead of real snow the set builders used upholstery cushion foam to give a snow look that didn't melt. After everything was built, the team referenced the cinematography in Zach's previous work in order to make their miniature sets look like the Northern Arctic. Videos of the voice actors also helped the animators to capture their expressions and performances.

### **ABOUT THE CAST**

#### **Madeline Ivalu - Ningiuq Angakkuq**

Madeline Ivalu is an award-winning director and actor. She is a co-founder of Arnait Video Productions, where she has been involved as an actor, producer and director. Her acting credits include *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner*, *Before Tomorrow* (which she co-directed), *Maliglutit* (Searchers), *The Grizzlies*, and *Restless River* (which she co-directed). Outside of acting, she is well known around Nunavut as a storyteller, musician, and writer, and often represents Inuit women in international events through different cultural organizations like Pauktutit and the Pan-Canadian Inuit Women's organization. Madeline lives in Igloolik, Nunavut.

#### **Lucy Tulugarjuk – Young Shaman**

Lucy Tulugarjuk is an actor, creative performer, and the Managing Director of Uvagut TV and the Executive Director of the Nunavut Independent Television Network (NITV). Lucy is well-known for her performances in feature films, and was awarded Best Actress from the American Indian Film Institute for her performance in *Atanarjuat The Fast Runner*, which won the *Caméra d'Or* and *Genie Award* for Best Picture in 2002. She is the co-writer and director of the 2018 feature film, *Tia and Piujuq*, which premiered at the Carrousel Children's Film Festival and the Boston Kid's Film Festival, and won the Jean Malaurie Prize at Festival du Film Canadienne in Dieppe, France. She was assistant director for Zacharias Kunuk's most recent film *One Day in the Life of Noah Piugattuk* (2019), which was featured at the Canada Pavilion in the 2019 Venice Biennale and selected as "Best Canadian Film" (Vancouver International Film Festival) and "TIFF Canada's Top Ten" films in 2019. In addition to her work in film and television, Lucy was a founding member

of Inuusiq, the Igloolik Youth Drama group that became Artcirq, and is a skilled throat singer and Inuktitut translator.

### **Jacky Qrunnut – Young Man**

Jacky is a musician, clown, and actor, and full-time father. He has had acting roles in other feature films including *Tia and Piujuq* (2018), and *One Day in the Life of Noah Piugattuk* (2019). Since 2004 he has been working with the Artcirq Inuit Performance Collective as an acrobat and clown. He has traveled with the group, from Timbuktu to Greece, Guinea, Mexico and France.

## **ABOUT THE CREW**

### **Zacharias Kunuk – WRITER, DIRECTOR, PRODUCER**

Born in 1957 in a sod house on Baffin Island, Zacharias Kunuk was a carver in 1981 when he sold three sculptures in Montreal to buy a home-video camera to bring back to his home community of Igloolik NU. In 1991 he co-founded Igloolik Isuma Productions Inc. with Paul Apak Angilirq, Pauloosie Qulitalik and Norman Cohn. In addition to the feature *Atanarjuat The Fast Runner* (2001 Cannes Camera d'Or), Kunuk has directed more than 30 documentaries and feature films including *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen*, *Inuit Knowledge and Climate Change*, and *Maliglutit (Searchers)*. His last feature, *One Day in the Life of Noah Piugattuk* (2019), premiered as the main artpiece of the Canadian Pavilion at the 58th Biennale di Venezia, where Kunuk and the Isuma Collective were Canada's representative artists. *Angakusajaujuq* is his first foray in the world of stop motion animation.

Kunuk is also the winner of three Genie Awards, a National Arts Award, and the National Aboriginal Achievement Award, and the 2017 Technicolor Clyde Gilmour Award from the Toronto Film Critics Association. In 2015, he was named an Officer of the Order of Canada, and in 2019, an Officer of the Order of Nunavut.

### **Neil Christopher - PRODUCER**

Over twenty years ago, Neil Christopher moved to Resolute Bay to work with the community to develop a local high school program. Since that time, Neil has been involved in culturally relevant education in Nunavut. In 2006, Neil was one of three people who co-founded Inhabit Media, Nunavut's first Inuit-owned, independent publishing company. They wanted to ensure northern Canadians had a meaningful voice in Canadian literature. Inhabit Media has a mandate to ensure stories of the North are told by people who live there. In 2012, Inhabit Media produced an animated film called *Amaqut Nunaat: The Country of Wolves*, based on an Inuit traditional story. This film was an international success, garnering many awards and critical acclaim. This prompted Neil to work with his business partners, Louise Flaherty and Danny Christopher, to start Taqut Productions. Since that time, Taqut Productions has produced award-winning short films, including *The Orphan and the Polar Bear* and *The Owl and the Lemming*, and the children's television series *Anaana's Tent*. Neil currently lives in the capital of Nunavut, Iqaluit.

### **Nadia Mike – PRODUCER**

Nadia Mike believes in the power of story and the influence it can have on children and youth. She wants to contribute in a way that she hopes youth can identify with—seeing themselves in stories and believing that they can truly be anything. If Inuit children can see themselves in these roles and be proud of who they are, this can have a positive impact. Nadia has a degree in education. Although she only taught for a few years, her passion was creating resources for Nunavut. She is the author of three picture books: *Leah's Mustache Party* (2016), *Ukaliq and*

*Kalla Go Fishing*, based on her short animated film of the same name (2017), and *The Muskox and the Caribou* (2018). While working for Inhabit Media, she soon got involved with its sister company Taqqut Productions and began writing for *Anaana's Tent*. She also took on roles as Director and Assistant Producer. Her hope is to make more educational programming that is in Inuktitut and relevant to the North.

### **Jonathan Frantz – WRITER, PRODUCER**

Jonathan Franz is a film producer and director of photography working with the Isuma artists' collective. After completing a Master's degree in community planning at the University of British Columbia, Jonathan spent four years living in the community of Igloolik, Nunavut, where he worked with the award-winning Inuit director Zacharias Kunuk. As a lead producer and director of photography, Jonathan has worked on four feature length documentaries, two documentary mini-series, and three feature films, including *Maliglutit (Searchers)* (2016) and *One Day in the Life of Noah Piugattuk* (2019). Jonathan was also a producer on *SGaawaay K'uuna (Edge of the Knife)* (2018), the world's first Haida-language feature film, winner of 6 Leo Awards, "Best Canadian Film" and "Best BC Film" at the Vancouver International Film Festival, and chosen as a "Canada's Top Ten" Film of 2018 by the Toronto International Film Festival. Most recently Jonathan was the lead producer of Isuma's exhibition at the 58th Venice Biennale.

### **Evan DeRushie - ANIMATION DIRECTOR**

Evan is a co-owner and animation director at Stop Motion Department (SMD), a Toronto animation studio specializing in stop-motion production. Since graduating from Sheridan College's Media Arts program in 2007, Evan has directed two original animated short films, "The Fox and the Chickadee" (2012) and "Birdlime" (2016), both of which played in festivals around the world and received multiple awards, including Best Film for Children at Animafest Zagreb. His career as an animator for TV, commercials and film has stretched from LA to Malaysia, with a highlight of animating on "The Little Prince" feature film, directed by Marc Osborne. Together with co-owner Philip Eddolls, SMD has collaborated with Taqqut Productions on a number of shorts and interstitials before undertaking the ambitious production of "The Shaman's Apprentice" in 2019.

### **Beatrice Deer – COMPOSER**

Beatrice Deer is an award-winning singer-songwriter and healthy lifestyle activist from the northern village of Quaqtaq, Nunavik, Quebec. Half Inuit/half Mohawk, Deer has created a body of work consisting of five albums, in which she uniquely blends Traditional Inuit Throat Singing and Contemporary Indie Rock, whilst pioneering the music genre known as 'Inuidie'. Her sixth album is to be released in the fall of 2021. In her music, the themes covered encompass classic Inuit folk tales and legends, and also deal with personal growth as an important tool in the search for understanding and the search for meaning. She is proud to be a role model for her community.

### **Monica Ittusardjuat - EXECUTIVE PRODUCER, CULTURAL CONSULTANT**

Monica Ittusardjuat is an Inuit Language Coordinator working on the Unification of the Inuktitut Writing System. Monica is an Inuit educator (M.Ed.), Inuktitut language expert, and Inuktitut editor. Monica worked at the Nunavut Teacher Education Program, with Neil and Louise training the next generation of Inuit teachers. Monica also worked at Nunavut Arctic College's Inuktitut Centre of Excellence with Louise. Most recently, Monica worked with ITK to travel across Canada working with the various Inuit groups to develop a common orthography standard.

### **Louise Flaherty - EXECUTIVE PRODUCER**

Louise is originally from Clyde River, Nunavut, and has lived in Iqaluit for almost 30 years. She was fortunate to be surrounded by great storytellers growing up, she is now able to pass these stories through the books she helps publish. She graduated with a Master of Education in 2013. Since then, Louise has been working hard to promote Inuktitut literacy. In 2006 Louise co-founded the Nunavut-based publishing company Inhabit Media. In her role as Inuktitut Publisher, Louise has worked to preserve and strengthen Inuktitut literacy and cultural knowledge. In 2012, with her partners at Inhabit Media, Louise co-founded Taqqut Productions, a Nunavut-based film and television production company. In her role as Producer for Taqqut, Louise continues to work to ensure the current generation of Nunavummiut never forget their culture and their language.

### **Daniel Christopher - EXECUTIVE PRODUCER**

Daniel is co-owner, producer and art director with Taqqut Productions. He is currently working on the upcoming short animated film The Legend of Day and Night. Daniel is a former contributing illustrator with the New York Times, and in his role as Art Director of Inhabit Media, he has illustrated The Legend of the Fog, A Children's Guide to Arctic Birds, and Animals Illustrated: Polar Bear. His work on The Legend of the Fog was nominated for the Amelia Frances Howard-Gibbon Illustration Award. He is well versed with the North and Inuit culture, having lived and travelled throughout the Canadian Arctic as an instructor for Nunavut Arctic College.

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### **Taqqut Productions**

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