



The Narwhal Hunt



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It is a bright August day in Pond Inlet. Piita is looking forward to going on a narwhal hunt with his daughter, Hagar. They love being on the water together.

Thank you for helping me pack, Hagar! Is that the last of our gear?





That's it! This box has some extra clothing, snacks, and our first aid kit.

Good, let's go!


Ethan and Qayaq are going to meet us at the shore.

Great! We can pick up the flotation suits and fill up our extra jerry can on the way.

Hagar volunteers with a youth justice program. Today, she is bringing two boys from the program on the hunt with her. The boys got in trouble with the RCMP for breaking into the store to steal pop. Hagar thinks these boys need a strong, proud role model like her ataata. So she is taking them on this hunt.

Good morning, boys!





Ataata, this is Ethan
and Qayaq.

Ullaakut, boys!
= COUGH, COUGH. =




Ataata, your cough sounds worse than usual. Do you have your inhaler with you?

Yes, Hagar. I take it everywhere these days.



Good. You will need it, especially with all the hard work we are going to do. Thankfully, Ethan and Qayaq are here to help us out.




Glad you're here, boys! We're going to need your help! I hope you're ready to work.

≡ *COUGH, COUGH.* ≡



Nice to meet you.

I'm only here because I have to be...



Time to put on these floatation suits, boys. Hagar and I signed them out of the Hunters and Trappers Office for you.

What's the point? I've never worn a floatation suit before. We just keep life jackets on board.



On my boat, we don't take risks. Narwhals are very powerful animals. If a narwhal collides with the boat, you could be knocked overboard.

A flotation suit will keep your head above water. Plus, it will keep you warm and dry in the freezing water until you can be rescued.



Yeah, I heard a story about someone who survived for four days in the water because he was wearing a flotation suit!



Whoa, really?



Okay, boys. We're going to push off now. Climb in and grab a paddle. I will drop the motor when we are in deep water.

COUGH,
COUGH,
COUGH.



Ataata, are you okay?

Don't worry, Hagar. I'll feel better once we are out at sea.



Are you sick, Piita?

Unfortunately, I cough like this all the time, Qayaq. I smoked for many years, and now I have lung disease. You'll hear me coughing a lot today, I'm afraid.

The technical term for it is COPD. That stands for chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. It's very common in smokers. If you boys smoke, you should think about quitting. I wish I had never started.

Hagar and Qayaq paddle in silence for a few minutes.



Okay, Ataata! We are in deep water now. You can drop the motor in. Qayaq, you can stop paddling now.

The boat speeds away from land. Qayaq and Ethan watch the community grow smaller behind them. Soon, they are surrounded by nothing but water and sky.



After some time, a few other boats appear in the distance. Piita slows their boat down.



Look at all the other hunters here today. If we have a good hunt, we can have a community feast with everyone in town!




Me either. It's cool to be so far from land.

I haven't been away from the community for a long time.



It's good to get out of town sometimes. Being on the land or at sea nurtures your mind and body.



Now, I need all of you to look for any ripples in the water. Hagar, grab the rifle and take the trigger lock off.

I've never seen a live narwhal. I hope we spot one!



I'm going to send a message to let everyone back home know we're okay.

How? Our cell phones won't work this far away from land!

I'll use our GPS tracking device. You can also use it to send messages. Check it out!


Before you go out on the land or on the water, you should always let someone know where you are going and how long you plan to be away for.



That way, if you get lost, someone will notice you are gone and will be able to send help in the right direction.


I had never thought of doing that!

Laughter and chatter from other hunters nearby carry across the water. Sometimes, Piita and Hagar make conversation with the boys. Sometimes, they enjoy a comfortable silence together.



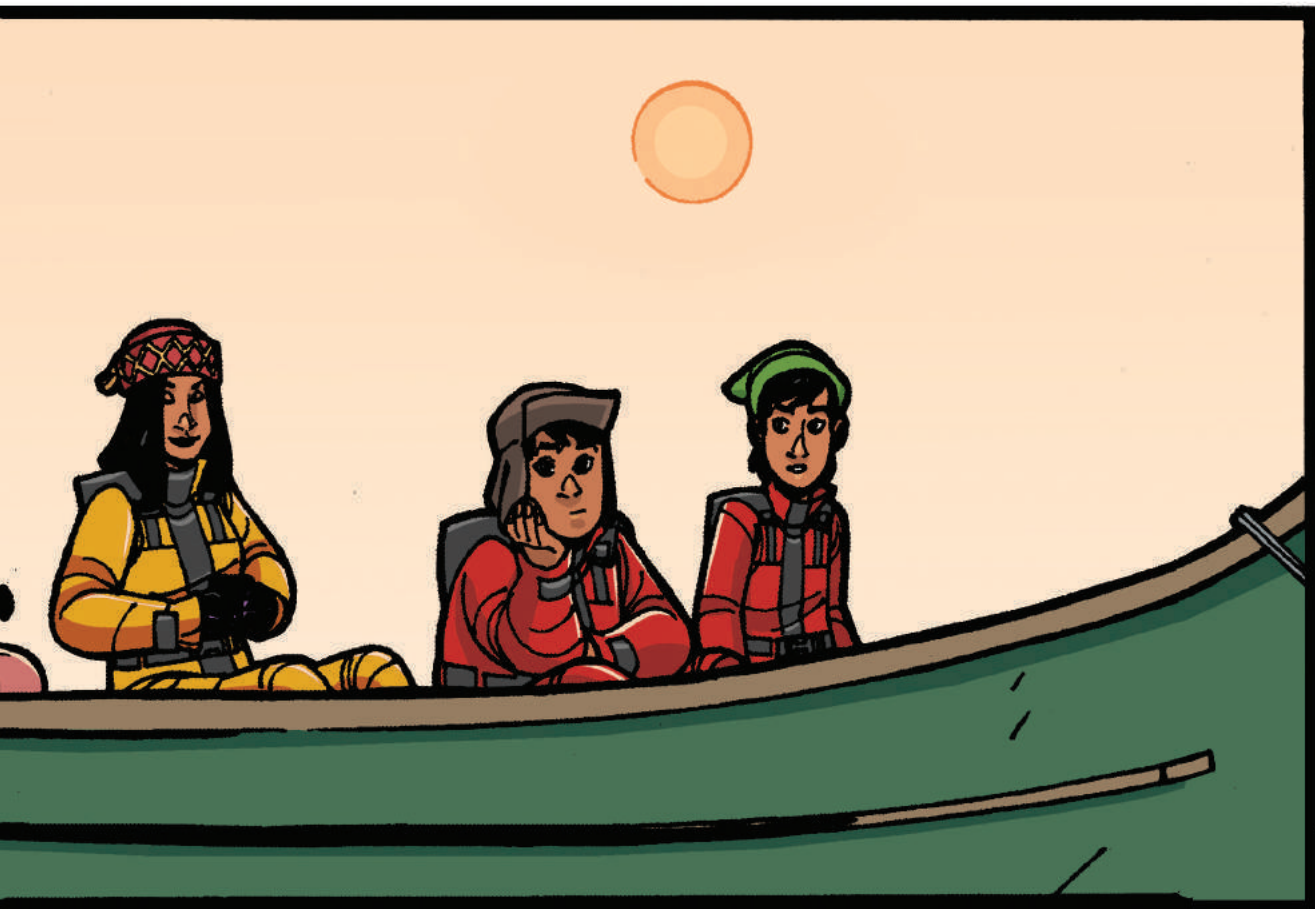
Piita, what if we don't see any narwhals? I haven't seen anything other than a few birds flying around.

Try to just enjoy the beautiful sunshine and the quiet, Qayaq. The narwhals will come.



I wish I had my own boat so I could come out here whenever I want. But I'll never be able to afford it.

That's not necessarily true, Qayaq. It took me a long time to be able to afford this boat.





I wish I could have a part-time job as a hunter.

Well, experienced hunters like me can always use some extra help.



Go to the beach and offer to help people pack their boats. Someone might invite you to join them for the day.

We might not be able to pay you, but we can teach you everything you need to know. And we will share our catch with you.

That would be cool!



I guess I'll save some money by not buying cigarettes anymore!


Hang on, Qayaq. Don't throw them in the water.

But they'll just sink, won't they?

That's not the point. An important part of being a good hunter is taking care of the environment. You can do that by not littering.

Sorry...

Don't worry, Qayaq. Like my ataata said, we are here today to learn.



By the way, I'm quitting smoking, too. It's been just over a month since I smoked a cigarette. You can do it!

I've heard it's really hard...



I've tried to quit before, and it can be hard. But this time I'm using a nicotine patch and it seems to be helping.



I quit last year, Gayaq. I used nicotine gum. It helped a lot! I used to have a cold all the time. I haven't had a cold since I quit.



You haven't smoked for a whole year, Ethan? Wow.

I can take you to the health centre sometime if you want to get more information about how to quit. They can talk to you about the patch, gum, or other ways to quit. There are lots of options.



That would be great, Hagar. Thanks!



Hey! I think I see something!

Cool! Where?

out that way!

Those are narwhals for sure. Look at those tusks!



Good eye! Qayaq, grab the rifle. Hagar, get the harpoon ready!



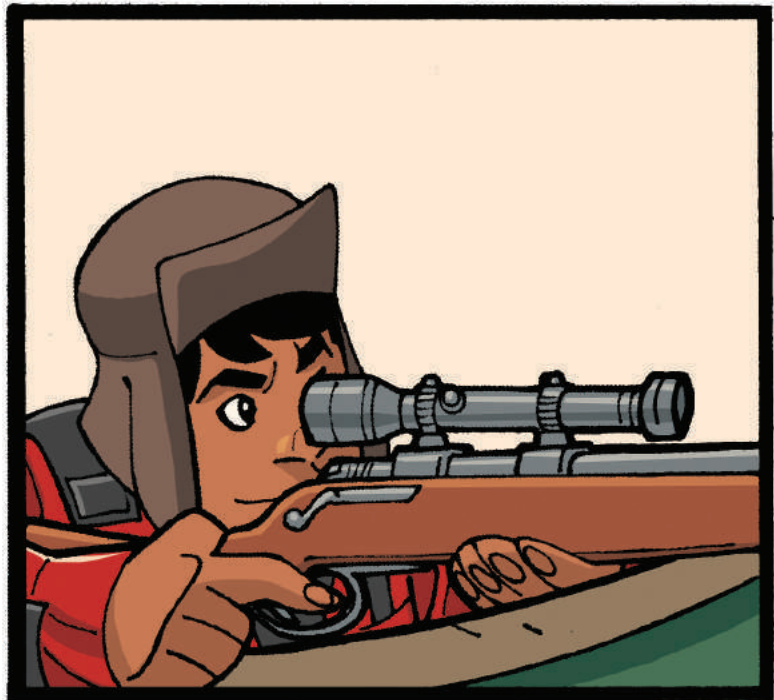
Piita races the boat toward the narwhals. As they get closer, a narwhal breaches.

Qayaq, get ready to take a shot when I say.

Qayaq thinks about hunting caribou with his older brother. He never imagined he would get to hunt narwhal. His heart is racing as he takes aim. Suddenly, he hears Piita's voice over the roaring engine.

Okay, now shoot!

BANG!



Hagar hurls her harpoon at the narwhal.



Piita drives right up to the narwhal.
It is still thrashing in the water.

Take another
shot, Gayaq!

BANG!





We got it!

That was so exciting!
My heart is pounding.



Okay, no time to slow down now.
We have to haul the narwhal to
shore! Grab the niksiik, boys!

Piita turns the boat back to shore. Ethan and Qayaq are using the niksiik to tow the narwhal beside them. Qayaq can't help but grin when he sees the animal's large tusk bob out of the water as they speed past other boats.



When they reach the shoreline, everyone jumps out of the boat to help haul the narwhal onto the beach.



Wow, it's huge!



Now we will have to get to work cutting up the narwhal.


I can't wait!
I've never cut up a narwhal before.

Me neither.
But I've helped my brother cut up a caribou.




My ataata taught me how to cut up a narwhal when I was about your age. Remember that, Ataata?

How could I forget?



The first step is to get organized. If you are clean and efficient, you can make use of the whole animal. You should do this with any animal—seal, caribou, birds like ptarmigan or geese.



I like to start just behind the head. The narwhal doesn't have a neck. But just imagine where the neck would start if it had one.

Then, I will cut all the way around the neck.



Hagar and I will do the first cuts. > *COUGH, COUGH.* <
You boys will do some cuts after you learn what to do.

Cool!



But how will we make the cut all the way around?
The narwhal is too heavy to roll over.



Good question, Ethan.

— COUGH, COUGH. —

You boys will have to use the niksiik to roll the narwhal over so I can finish the cut.


Eventually, Piita, Hagar, and the boys have cut up the whole narwhal. The impressive tusk is still attached to the skull. Everyone is sitting and enjoying some maktaaq and tea together.






The tusk is awesome! My ataatatsiaq made a carving for me out of a tusk once. I still have it in my bedroom.

I knew your ataatatsiaq, Gayaq. His carvings are beautiful. He would be proud to see you on this hunt today.




My ataatsiaq would also be proud to know I am quitting smoking. He never smoked, but my anaanatsiaq died of lung cancer from smoking. He missed her so much. He always told me to quit smoking.



You can think of him any time you are having trouble quitting, Qayaq. Whenever I want to smoke, I think of my ataata and I feel stronger.






You boys made me proud today. I know that you have made some bad decisions in the past, but you listened and learned so much today. I want you to know that you are always welcome to come out on the boat with me.

Thank you for everything today, Piita and Hagar. It feels really good to know that you believe in me. Even if I've made some dumb decisions, like breaking into the store.



I feel the same way. I'm happier today than I've been in a long time. Sometimes I get so bored and restless, and then I get angry. That's when I end up getting into trouble.





The next time you're bored or angry, Qayaq, remember how you are feeling right now. The land is a good place to heal, and it is always there for you to explore.

I will. And I will never forget what it felt like to hunt my first narwhal. Thank you.

The next day, everyone came to the community centre for a feast of maktaaq and other country food.

Look at all the people!

It feels like the whole community is here.

These feasts really bring the community together.





I learned from my ataata that the best part of hunting is giving back to our community.

And the best part of being a hunter is sharing your knowledge with the next generation.



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In this exciting graphic novel, Qayaq and Ethan set off on their first narwhal hunt. Joined by Piita, a local Elder, and his daughter, Hagar, the boys spend the day at sea learning about traditional and modern hunting practices from these accomplished hunters. Will they be successful and bring a narwhal back to their community for a feast?

Read on to find out!



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