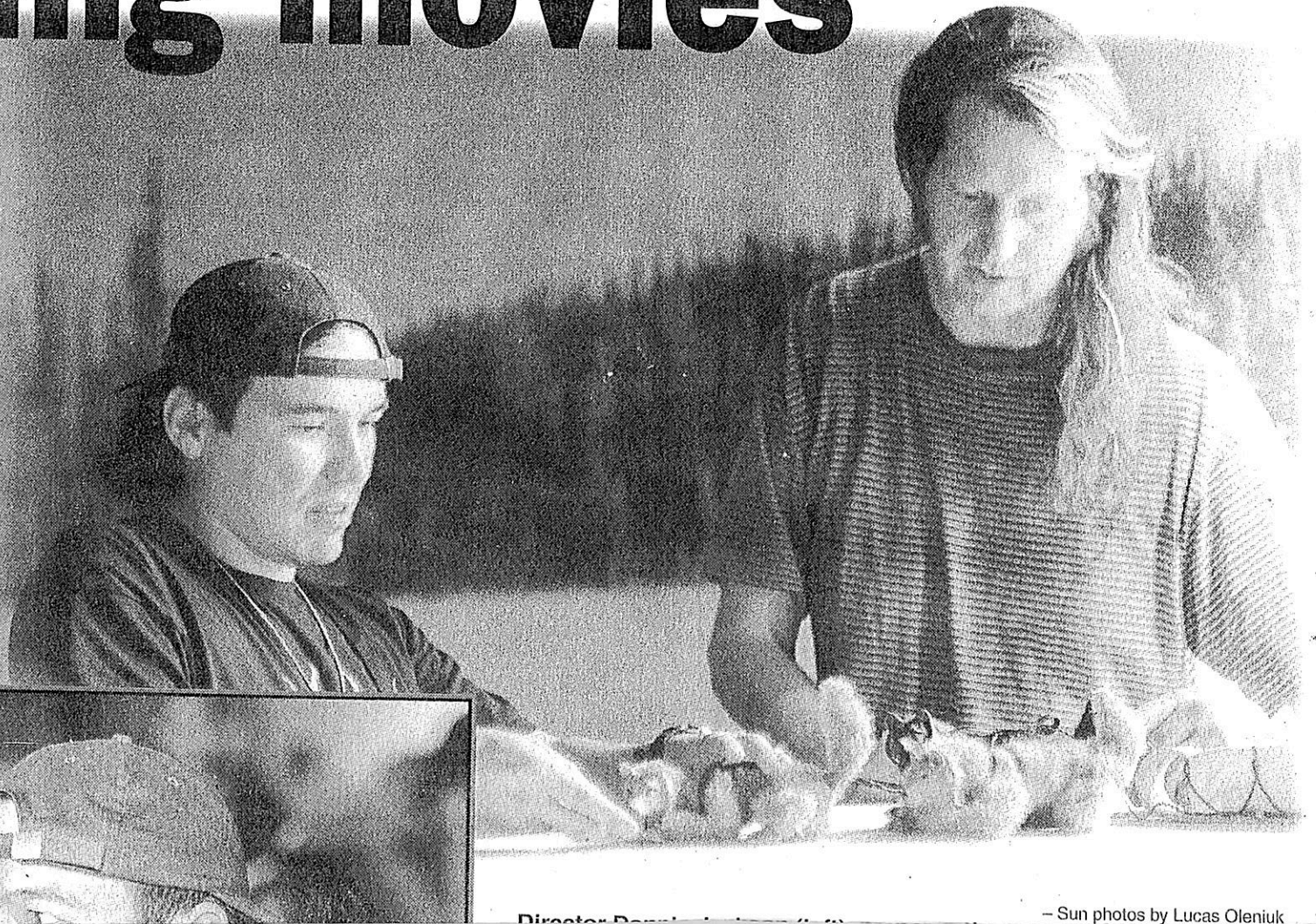


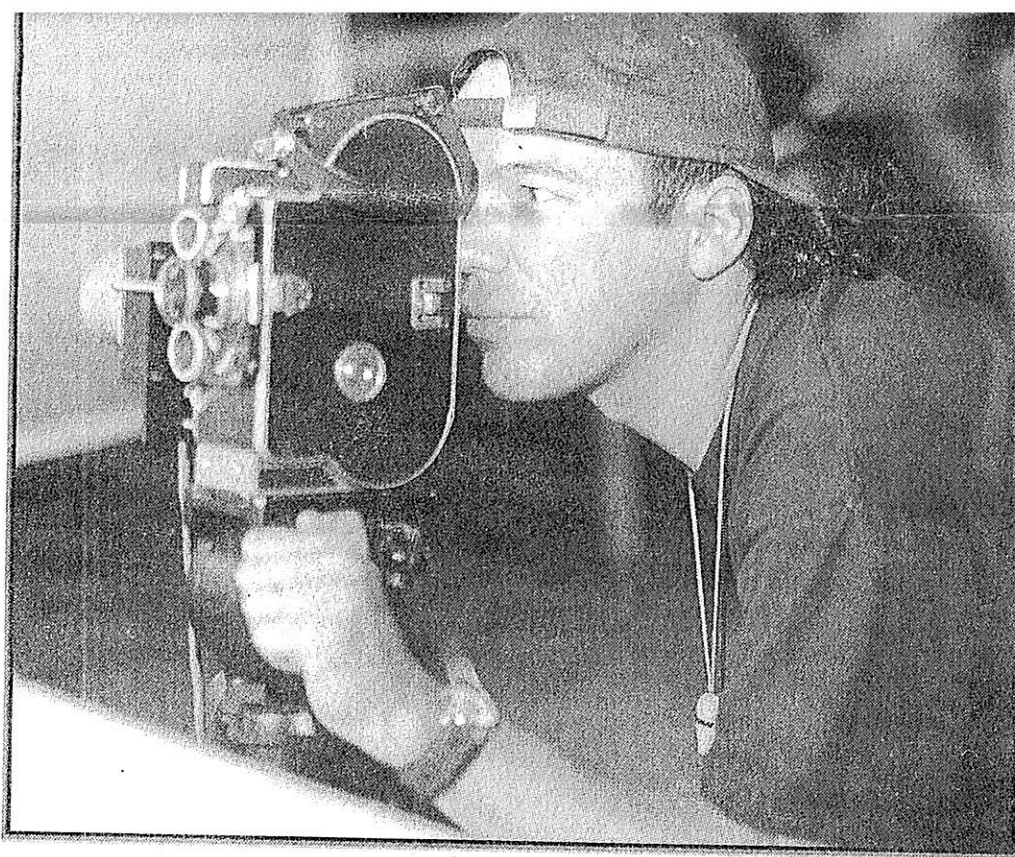
Entertainment

Making movies

one
step
at a
time



Director Danny [Name] [Name]



Director Dennis Jackson (left) prepares the set with Gerald Saul and frames a shot with the stop-action camera

— Sun photos by Lucas Oleniuk

Dennis Jackson was barely out of film school when he won national recognition at the Banff Television Festival for his first animated short.

Journey Through Fear, a six-minute claymation, told the story of a Native elder coming to terms with environmental changes on the trap line in northern Saskatchewan.

The Saskatchewan filmmaker is now taking the character of Mushom — Cree for Grandfather — into a one-hour made-for-TV adventure.

Christmas at Wapos Bay began shooting at the beginning of the July in the Media Group studios on Millar Ave. The production is employing around 20 cast, crew and craftspeople, including four students from the Saskatchewan Centre for Emerging Technologies

(SCETCH).

"It's 100 per cent Saskatchewan," said Jackson.

The film — using the rigorous stop-motion animation process — is being produced in both Cree and English and will air as a Christmas special on the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN) and Saskatchewan Communications Network (SCN).

The story surrounds Mushom and his three grandchildren who are visiting him a few days before Christmas. Mushom fears they may have to cancel holiday celebrations since resources are scarce on the trap line. The children, confident in the skills their grandfather has taught them, set out on their own to gather food but get caught in a snowstorm.

"They still have a lot to learn. Even as an elder Mushom is still constantly learning."

Jackson wrote the script with Jordan Wheeler, whose credits include CBC-TV's North of 60 and The Rez.

A series of custom-built scale models including log cabins with detailed interiors serve as the set. The scenic backgrounds are enlarged photographs Jackson took of northern Saskatchewan.

There are 10 characters along with six dogs, designed and built by the SCETCH students.

Stop-motion animation is a time-consuming process. The puppets are brought to fluid cinematic life through detailed manipulation on a frame-by-frame basis of their body parts. A short scene of a character walking or raising its arm, for example, requires numerous subtle adjustments on every frame.

It takes about a day to complete one minute of film. Jackson expects shooting to wrap at the end of August.

"It's tedious work."

Jackson's Dark Thunder Productions received funding for the \$350,000 production from a variety of sources including APTN, SCN, Saskfilm, Telefilm Canada and Canwest Global.

He said winning the Banff award in 1998 was a big boost to his career. Sponsored by Telefilm Canada and APTN, the award includes a \$10,000 grant towards a future production as well as access to post-production facilities at the Banff Centre for the Arts.

Each year the festival honours two aboriginal productions — one in

English or French and one in an aboriginal language. Journey Through Fear was Jackson's final project in film school at the University of Regina.

At last year's festival he won best aboriginal-language production for an episode of his series Heartbeat of the Earth, about the Cree, Dene and Metis people in northern Saskatchewan. His spouse Melanie Jackson served as editor and production manager for the series.

Jackson is now working on a documentary about the effects of the Island Falls Hydroelectric Station on the environment and his home community of Sandy Bay. His previous documentary, Open Fire, looked at aboriginal men and women fighting fires in northern Saskatchewan.

His films are produced in both Cree and English and, like his other projects, Christmas at Wapos Bay aims to do more than entertain.

"I don't know my language but I value its importance. Lan-

guages are being lost all over our province. I want to prevent others from losing it, and to get our youth not to take it for granted."

That includes his two sons, ages nine and 11. Melanie Jackson said it's the main reason she became involved in film and video.

"It's preserving our language and culture for them so it won't be lost."



Jenny GABRUCH

ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR