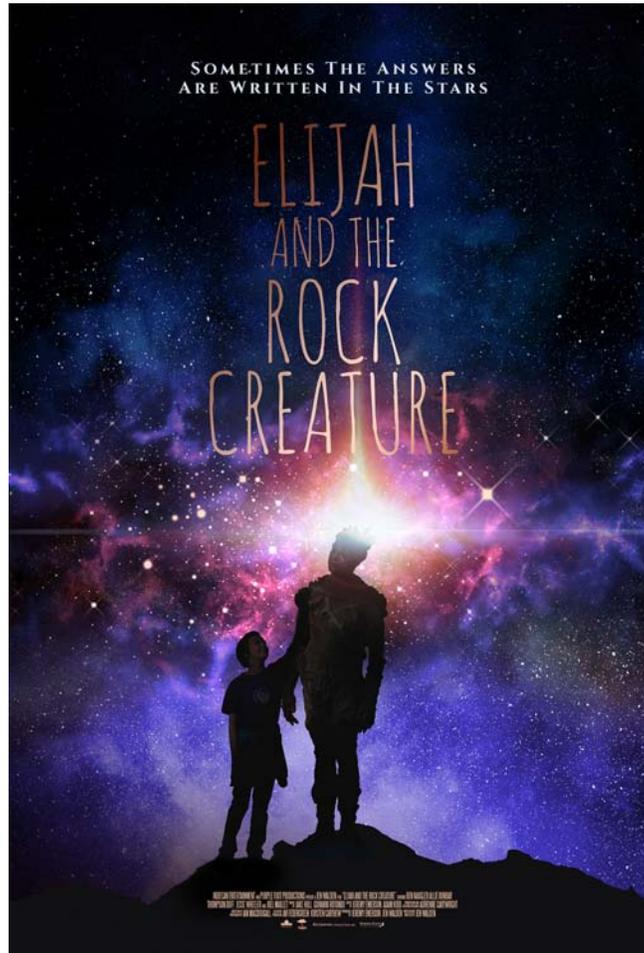


ELIJAH AND THE ROCK CREATURE



A film by Jen Walden

Run time: 84 min

Producers:
Jeremy Emerson
Tel: 867-445-6019
cabinproductions@gmail.com

Jen Walden
Tel: 867-765-8281
waldenpaint@yahoo.ca

Distribution & Sales:
Avi Federgreen
Indiecan Entertainment
Tel: 1 416 898 3456
avif@sympatico.ca

ABOUT ELIJAH AND THE ROCK CREATURE



Short Synopsis:

A grieving boy and his mother embark on a trip to see the stars at the largest dark sky preserve in the world. Unable to contain his excitement, 10-year-old Elijah wanders away from his mother and loses his way in the vast wilderness of Wood Buffalo National Park. As he struggles to find his way back, Elijah encounters an extraordinary creature in a similar circumstance. The unlikely pair forms a bond and together learns that sometimes following your heart is the best way to find your way home.

Long Synopsis:

A grieving 9-year-old boy who has recently lost his father and is struggling to connect with his mother is surprised by an unlikely present from his vagabond uncle, a telescope and a trip to the largest Dark Sky Preserve in the world in the world. Unable to contain his excitement, the boy ignores his mother's advice and wanders away from their remote campsite to set up his new telescope. Frightened by a strange presence accompanied by flashes of light the boy panics and bolts across the rocks, quickly losing his way in the vast wilderness of Wood Buffalo Park.

Before long the boy's mother returns to the campsite after fetching water to realize that her son is no longer there. At the remote self-register campground, out of cell range, there is no staff, or other campers to turn to for help. The boy's mother takes matters into her own hands, by tearing down an area contour map and heading into the bush to find her son. Only before to long, she also becomes lost.

As the boy struggles to find his own way back, he realizes he is being followed and soon encounters an extraordinary creature from the other side of the universe, who seems to be in a similar circumstance – also lost. The unlikely pair form a bond, realizing that they are not so different in their wish to connect with their mother's, and to find a way home. Together they cross a formidable landscape, but it's not until the boy learns that the creature has the ability to follow him inside of his own thoughts making his memories a physical space that they begin to realize they already have the answers to getting home. As the boy and creature journey through physical memories in the boy's memory palace, they discover how to find the creature's home across the vastness of space.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

As a visual artist I have always been fascinated with the language of images. The phrase “a picture paints a 1000 words” has always been a truth for me. Delving into film has been a natural transition. I still work with colour and light to create painterly images, only now these paintings move. Their ability to express more than a 1000 words is exciting and inspiring to me to tell stories that are fun, delight, magical and still hit your emotional nerve right in the gut.

Elijah and the Rock Creature evolved from a moment caught in my mind. Hiking the northern rocks with my children aged four and six, I was photographing a picturesque landscape as inspiration for painting. Watching my children leap from rock to rock, bounding back and forth with sticks and arming themselves with moss as they tumbled through the landscape, it occurred to me that they were living a very different reality right next to me. What was this parallel world they seemed to walk in a few feet away, that appeared fraught with danger and filled with adventure? Wishing I had the magic lens that would allow me to see the world through their eyes, I decided to create one.

Painting this world did not seem adequate to do it justice, I wanted something that moved with the same enthusiasm as my children, filled with the same heart and passion as my family, and set in the same incredible landscapes that we explored regularly. From this came the story of Elijah, a young boy out in the northern wilderness, separated from his mother, and living a very different experience than hers.

I wanted to explore the family bond that holds a parent and child connected regardless of time or place. This film brings a child's imaginative view of the world into focus and makes it a reality while juxtaposing it next to a parent's view of the world overrun by worry. In the end, the string that attaches them together ultimately leads everyone home.



Q&A WITH WRITER / DIRECTOR JEN WALDEN

What is *Elijah and the Rock Creature* about to you?

Elijah and the Rock Creature is the story of a young boy who gets lost in the wilderness of northern Canada. While lost, he encounters an extraordinary being from another planet, who, as it turns out is also lost. The two team up and form an unlikely bond. They use all their smarts and unique abilities to help each other find their way home. But while Elijah lives one reality lost in the wilderness, his mother's experience is very different. She struggles with the panic of losing her child, as well as experience the unwavering determination of a parent to find their missing child.

Although the film follows a mother and son over the course of 24 hours alone in the wilderness the film is about more than that. For me this film is about the connection between parent and child, it is about grief and how we help each other heal through stories, memories and staying strong together. Elijah and his mother not only overcome the obstacle of being physically separated but they also overcome the obstacle of being emotionally separated. In the end there is the realization that the bond between parent and child can transcend time and space, that we carry our loved ones inside us.

Most writers have the story then find the location. You had the location that inspired the story. How did the story of *Elijah and the Rock Creature* come to be?

I am a single parent with two curious, active and imaginative kids and we are constantly going on "Adventures" as we call them, hiking, camping, finding random spots off the side of the road to go exploring. From the time they could walk we have been clambering around the landscape of the Northwest Territories where we live. My "day job" is working as a visual artist.



Every time we go out adventuring I bring my camera and I am taking 100's of photos, which I use as inspiration and a reference for when I get back to my painting studio.

A few years ago I got interested in working in film and creating moving images not just static painted ones. When I would be out with my kids in these spectacular environments taking photos, I would think first "I need to paint this", and then I would think "wow, I want to film this, I need a story that could take place right here, right were we are standing because it's so beautiful, its so incredible". So I decided I would do just that. I would write a story that could fit into all of these amazing locations I had explored with my kids. It then only made more sense to me to write a story about a kid, because what inspired me as a parent was watching my children run around in these amazing locations.

The other thing that struck me was that while I was taking photos to inspire paintings, my kids were always leaping off rocks, clambering walls, fighting unseen beasts and escaping imagined perils. I thought, "I wish I could see the world they are living in right now, they are five feet away from me but living this totally different reality." This is when the idea of the Rock Creature came to me, to put in an element of fantasy, because it was apparent to me that what the kids experienced in this landscape was far more "fantastical" than what I experienced.

Where did you shoot the film and what were the specific challenges of shooting on location?

We shot this film entirely in the Northwest Territories. We filmed in and around Yellowknife as well as at provincial parks and locations within a 100 km radius of Yellowknife, and then we also drove eight hours south to the town of Ft Smith, and we filmed just outside of town as well as in Wood Buffalo National Park.

There were A LOT of challenges to filming on location. A lot of the specific areas that I wanted to film in were either in Territorial or National Parks. We were able to get permission to film there, but we had to respect park regulation, which usually meant NO VEHICLES. This meant A LOT of hiking carrying gear on our backs. Some places we hiked in kilometers carrying gear, and food and water. It also meant being in the northern bush that the bugs were insane and we were at the mercy of weather.

At the same time, one of our major advantages is we had an entirely northern crew. It was amazing for me, because I had this group of people who believed in the project, and also who know the north, who are comfortable doing a 10 km hike over rocks and through scrub brush, up rocky hillsides with a camera or dolly rails on their backs! These folks know the terrain, they can handle the bugs and they were always in great spirits. When we went into Wood Buffalo Park we were only allowed in with a



group of 12, this included cast, in order to minimize any environmental impact. It meant everyone did 4 or 5 different roles. I remember hiking into the salt planes with a cooler of sandwiches on my head. Our producer must have hiked 50km that day in and out from the salt flats. But the footage we got is incredible, something you can't fake in any studio or with any green screen. (Not that we would have had the money for that anyway! But even if we did, I would have chosen the long hike in for the real deal).

How do you feel being a visual artist influenced your filmmaking?

I think it has a big impact because I approach everything from the perspective of creating a composition, the same way I would when working on a painting. I'm really focused on the visual, the colours, the lines, the balance, and the unity of the image. I know that story is so important, but I feel like I start with the image, and then work very carefully to ensure that the story is the *right story* to be telling within that image. It may seem somewhat backwards but it's what comes naturally to me as an artist and as a filmmaker.

How did your children inspire the story?

Both my children played a big role in helping me to develop this story. I began working on this story concept when my son was six and my daughter three. They are now ten and seven. They have helped inform the story and the character of Elijah. I would ask them "what would you do if you were lost?" or "what would you say in this situation?" They have given incredible insight and story ideas that are now integral parts of the final film, such as the trail of flags and the invisible string that connects parent to child. There are sections of dialogue between the mother and son that come from a journal I have kept of interesting or heart-warming conversations I have had with my children over the years.

My son helped us film a concept trailer for this film 4 years ago, and I still have my daughter's drawings of what she envisioned the rock creature would look like hanging on the wall in my studio - ha ha - they are not far off! So I think you could safely say that they have been a huge part of the process and an inspiration every step of the way.

How did you find Ben Naugler to play Elijah?

We held open auditions in Yellowknife and had all sorts of kids come out. Ben impressed us right away; he was really natural in his delivery, and very comfortable in a room full of adults and with a camera in his face. Even though he had never done any film work before his confidence impressed us, and we were excited to work with him right from the get go.

What was the process involved in creating the character of Elijah with Ben?

Ben was cast right at the end of the school year, and we didn't film until later in August. So we had time in July to hang out and talk a lot about the character and to really pull the script apart. We would also get together with a local drama teacher from the high school who helped us run through theatre games, and exercises to help Ben draw on different emotions and control his physicality. We also spent a lot of time throwing beanbags at each other and trying to knock over a mannequin head that had been nicknamed "Rodrigo". I know... kinda weird but really the best way to get results is to let loose and have some fun.

What was the inspiration for the Rock Creature?

The idea of a creature came from watching my own children immersed in their imaginary world while we were out hiking in various locations across the Territory. The look of the creature came from the land itself. In Yellowknife we are on this incredible part of the Canadian Shield, the rocks are ancient. Some of the oldest rocks in the world are exposed here, and they are covered in all sorts of intricate lichen and cool moss. I wanted the creature to be made of the land that we were walking on because its just so cool looking!

What was the process of creating the costume?

I was so lucky to have met a special effects make-up artist Matt Aebig who had come north to run workshops as part of the Dead North Film Festival. I would send him drawings, sketches and photos of the rocks and even mailed him boxes with small rocks, lichen and moss to get the concept refined. Once we had our drawings, we sent our actor to Vancouver so Matt and his team could do a full body cast – teeth and all! Then they were able to create various molds in order to create the creature suit that Thompson would wear. When it was time to film Matt and his team came north and stayed for half the shoot, training a team of northern makeup artists and me how to do the creature suit application. It was pretty amazing. My painting skills came in handy in a big way. By the end of the shoot our northern team could apply this incredible full body suit, and I would come and spend an hour before going out on location to paint Thompson’s face. It’s something I never thought I could or would be doing. Honestly it’s one of the cool things about Indie filmmaking, you really do get to try your hand at everything. I like being in that kind of challenging environment and learning on the job.



What is Indiecan 20K and how was it fundamental in getting your first feature film made?

Indiecan 20K is an initiative run by Avi Federgreen of Federgreen Entertainment that aims at helping emerging filmmakers take the next big step in their career. In order to participate it must be your first feature, and you need to be teamed up with a producer also working on their first feature. I worked with Jeremy Emerson who I had done short films with here in Yellowknife. Jeremy is incredible and he was willing to embark on this crazy ride with me. Indiecan was absolutely fundamental in helping us to make my first feature film. Without it I'm not sure I ever would have taken the plunge. I met Avi at the Yellowknife Film festival and he really encouraged me to apply, to give it a shot. Without his encouragement this movie would never have been made. It was originally a short film script, and his encouragement pushed me to do the work and write it into a feature. I don't think I would have gone out and found all the resources needed to make a feature film on my own, it was too daunting. But Indiecan 20K gave me a framework to work in, a boost to get started, and I met all sorts of contacts in all areas of production that I would not have otherwise had the opportunity to meet. It was a real door opener for sure.

Any fun stories from set you'd like to share?

Yellowknife is a small town and everyone knows everyone. I had a ton of support in making this film; we had to raise funds through a social media campaign in order to make the film happen. So everyone in town knew it was going on and everyone was supporting the film in some way. During filming we would use my home art studio as the base to do the Rock Creature make up. It was quite an intensive process. Once Thompson was made up, someone would drive him out to set, which often meant crossing town. Our makeup team from Vancouver who are less familiar with town were bringing Thompson out to set, and missed a road sign where the speed limit drops from 60 to 45. They got pulled over by the police. Normally you might think a police officer would be somewhat startled when they look in the car and see a full Rock Creature with crystal hair, and lichen growing all over his body casually sitting in the passenger seat. The officer didn't bat an eye. When our driver explained they were working on a film, the officer looked at the creature again and then casually said "Oh, Jen Walden's film?" Then issued a warning, sent them on their way and wished the production good luck. We laughed a lot about that.

What do you hope people will take away from watching the film?

I hope that people feel that kick in your stomach when you realize how much love you have for someone and embrace that feeling. I hope that kids feel inspired and light hearted but also a sense of connection between the story and their own lives. I hope people will come away inspired by the north and wanting to visit this place. I hope that people will take northern film making seriously and see the kind of talent, creativity and persistence we have up here. I hope people will just feel happy, that they watched something funky, something that doesn't come with all the Hollywood polish but is just as fun to watch. If even one of these things strikes people when they see the movie then I will be happy.

ABOUT THE CAST

Ben Naugler (ELIJAH)

Ben is new to film. He recently performed as Kurt Von Trapp in the local production of "The Sound Of Music". He will be starting Grade 8 in September 2018, and is super excited to continue to pursue his love of acting in *Elijah and the Rock Creature*.



Allie Dunbar (CAROLYN)

Allie Dunbar is a Canadian actress born and raised in the Greater Toronto Area. Dunbar attended Queen's University where she received her BA in Theatre. She then moved to the big apple where she attended The Neighborhood Playhouse School of the Theatre. She recently returned from Vancouver where she was shooting the upcoming Disney Feature film *Timmy Failure*. She can be seen on season two of *Handmaids Tale* and recently wrapped the theatre production, *Greater Tuna*, at The Gravenhurst Opera House.

Thompson Duff (ELTANIN)

Thompson Duff studied acting at The University of Waterloo and has appeared in The Stratford Festival, Canadian Badlands Passion Play, tour videos for Rush, and most recently on CBC's *Canada: The Story of Us*. *Elijah and the Rock Creature* is his first feature film.

JOEL MAILLET (MALCOLM)

Joel's adolescent video antics led him to film school, where he studied acting for the screen. Since then, aside from directing, he has been acting in short films, music videos, and small stage productions. His latest role was of Robin Leach of "Lifestyles of the rich and famous"- the host of a parody stage-play.

Jesse Wheeler (UNCLE JAMIE)

Jesse has acted all over Canada in theatre, film, and TV productions. He is most recognized from his role of Harley in *Blackstone*, while his other TV credits include *The Killing* and *Supernatural*. He has also appeared in the feature films *Charlie St. Cloud* and *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*. This is his second time working with Jen Walden after they first collaborated on her short film, *Painted Girl*.

ABOUT THE CREW



JEN WALDEN – WRITER/DIRECTOR

Jen Walden is a Yellowknife filmmaker and one of northern Canada's most noted painters. Her unique eye for aesthetic detail and captivating storylines has resulted in three award-winning short films since her move into film media in 2015. She now creates visually stunning full-length features with substance, character and heart. Her first short, *Painted Girl*, appeared on CBC's Short Film Faceoff as one of nine national finalists in 2016. In 2017, Walden became one of six women selected for the inaugural Academy Apprenticeship for Woman Directors run by the Academy of Canadian Cinema and Television. Walden's first feature film, *Elijah and the Rock Creature* was shot entirely on location in the Northwest Territories with a northern cast and crew. The film is set for release in September 2018.

JEREMY EMERSON - PRODUCER

Jeremy Emerson graduated in 2008 from the University of Lethbridge with a Bachelors of Fine Arts in New Media. He has spent several summers working in Vancouver on Television series as a production assistant and on independent productions. His experience has included working as a production coordinator, boom operator, camera operator and editor. Jeremy is currently the executive director for Western Arctic Moving Pictures, the North's independent media arts production centre. He also runs his own media company Cabin Productions. He has produced several short films, *Elijah and the Rock Creature* is his first feature length film as a producer.

AVI FEDERGREEN – EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

Avi Federgreen's over twenty years of experience in the Canadian film industry includes over fifty films produced. Federgreen's newly completed films, which are travelling around the film festival circuit include *Man Running* directed by Gary Burns, *Lifechanger* directed by Justin McConnell, and *Altered Skin* directed by Adnan Ahmed. Federgreen also is the creator of the *Indiecan10K & Indiecan20K* First Feature Initiatives that have now helped 8 first features get made in Canada including the NWT film *Elijah and the Rock Creature* directed by Jennifer

Walden and the Northern Ontario film *Fugue* directed by Tomas Street. Federgreen's other producing credits include *One Week*, *Still Mine*, *Kiss and Cry*, *Prisoner X*, *Score: A Hockey Musical*, *Relative Happiness*, *How To Plan An Orgy in A Small Town*, *Moon Point*, *I'm Yours*, *Hungry Hills*, *High Life*, *Leslie*, *My Name Is Evil* to name a few.

In November 2011, Federgreen opened his own film distribution and sales company INDIECAN ENTERTAINMENT. The company services not just up-and-coming Canadian and International filmmakers, but also those indies making films in a lower budget bracket who have otherwise virtually no chance to shine in a market of big studios, distributors and exhibitors. Indiecan has now released over 100 films in Canada, over 50 films in the US and now represents 17 documentaries for International Sales.