

double the heat on jacob two-two

There were some infamous goings-on lately in Montreal before *Jacob Two-Two Meets the Hooded Fang* was wrapped up. Canada's answer to *The Wizard of Oz* should be released by Christmastime. Joan Irving visited the shoot.

by Joan Irving

A sad Jacob Two-Two being led to the Children's Prison by Mistress Fowl (Joy Coghill) and Master Fish (Guy L'Ecuyer)

It is hot under the lights—damn hot. One member of the crew lifts a blue T-shirt to mop his brow; the others just let it drip. Yesterday, apparently, it was even worse with 20 extras crowding the 19th century Montreal courtroom, the current location of **Jacob Two-Two Meets the Hooded Fang**.

Director Ted Flicker shouts his instructions in English. His assistant, Mireille Goulet, also dressed in all-white, circulates quietly among the crew members elaborating in French.

It is the second week of shooting. Flicker and the crew are still testing each other. For Flicker it is the first time he has worked in Canada and he doesn't *know* the people surrounding him on the shoot. For most of the crew, Flicker is the first American director they have worked with and, for still others, it is their first feature being filmed in English.

That and the 25-day shooting schedule of the feature, budgeted at over 1 million dollars, pushes up the centigrade reading in the closed room.

Into this walks Jacob Two-Two. "I want one quart of chocolate ice cream, please. I want one quart of chocolate ice cream, please." Stephen Rosenberg, 8, is small for his age. That's one of the reasons why he has the role of Jacob Two-Two. The other reason is that he is darn cute, gap between his front teeth and all.

Jacob Two-Two says everything two times. On this particular morning he is on trial for insulting a big person. The judge (Earl Pennington), leering at the boy from his towering judge's bench, announces the verdict and sentences him to two years, two months, two weeks, two days, two hours and two minutes in the darkest dungeons of the children's prison.

"With all respect, your Lordship... with all respect, your Lordship..."

Pennington muffs his lines a couple of times; Stephen sails through the scene.

He was chosen from among over 3,600 children that Harry Gulkin, producer of **Jacob Two-Two**, and Ted Flicker saw when they were casting this spring. After scanning the files of several talent agencies without success (though Kirsten Bishopric, who plays the fearless O'Toole, was found through an agency) they picked Stephen out of a second-grade class at Roslyn School in Montreal.

Marfa Richler, 12, who as the intrepid Shapiro has the other lead role in the film, attends the same school. Apparently, the principal pointed her out to Gulkin. The daughter of Mordecai Richler, author of the book on which the film is based, there was some reluctance at first to hire Marfa. On set, however, Flicker raves about her. "I think Marfa is going to grow up to be a movie star."

Journalists have been asked to stay away from the children (so they don't get the impression they are important) but professional curiosity prevails... Stephen, at any rate, is hard to avoid. His energy carries him all over the set. One wants to ask all the obvious questions. The answers, just as obvious, are delivered with equanimity. Does the work tire you? "Sometimes." How do you learn your lines? "I read them over with Howard in the morning and I remember them."

(Howard Ryshpan is the dialogue coach. He grimaces at a reference to mother-henning but in fact he is constantly with the kids, making sure they don't drink too many Cokes and hustling them onto the set when they are called for.)

Marfa, in her polite English accent, confesses she has told only one friend that she is acting in the movie. What's it like? "It's hot, different, tiring, interesting, hard." Smart kid.

The book, **Jacob Two-Two Meets the Hooded Fang**, was written for her young brother, Jacob. "Dad was spinning a tale on the couch. Jacob wanted him to finish telling it and finally Dad went upstairs and wrote it down."

The day before visiting the set, I spent an hour in a local children's library, seated in a small chair at a small table, reading Richler's book. The librarian said I was lucky to find it in; their four copies were in constant circulation.

The story is a delight. It is the kind of fearsome, provocative fantasy that kids get off on. When Jacob is sent to children's prison he is shown the way by two monster-like creatures — Mistress Foul and Master Fish (Joy Coghill and Guy L'Ecuyer marvellously costumed by François Barbeau). They cross to an island surrounded by fog and ruled over by the Hooded Fang. Jacob Two-Two, aided by Shapiro and O'Toole, representatives of Child Power, eventually frees the children held there. In the story it is just before Jacob wakes up.

An enthusiasm about the script and the production pervades the set. Flicker says he has taken on the attributes of the script and is feeling "childish". He believes he is directing a children's classic, the kind of film that will play every few years; the kind of film that parents will *want* to take their kids to. Executive producer of the film, John Flaxman, up from New York for the week, says he has no "guilt" about the film. "It will be the first film I've been associated with that I can take my whole family to."

Harry Gulkin, chatting with those around the coffee machine in the hall outside the set, sheds business concerns for a moment. "This idea of Richler's is lovely, warm. I think it's great that the world will get a chance to see this side of Mordecai, to see him not only in the light of St. Urbain Street and the satirical memories of his youth."

"I'm very pleased to be working on this film. It seems I keep doing things which are closer to me—of my time and place."

His involvement in the project was almost a matter of chance: two financial consultants brought Gulkin and John Flaxman together. Flaxman purchased the film rights to the book after reading a review in *The New York Times*. A script, written by Ted Flicker, locating the story in Los Angeles, had already been completed when Gulkin met with Flaxman in March to discuss repatriating the location of the script to Canada.

From the beginning of negotiations it was understood that Ted Flicker, a frequent partner of Flaxman's and a writer/director with a long list of credits in American theatre, television and feature work (**The Troublemaker**, **The President's Analyst**) would direct **Jacob Two-Two**.

The final agreement stipulated that the entire crew and cast, with the exception of Alex Karras who had already been cast as the Hooded Fang, were to be Canadian. The film is, according to Gulkin, not a co-production but a Canadian production.

One of his first moves as producer was to apply to the CFDC for financial support. The application was refused on the basis of CFDC guidelines requiring either the writer or the director to be a Canadian.

Gulkin is still bristling. He says that the project was rejected on a "technicality" (authorship) and criticizes the corporation for a lack of flexibility in its response to the project.

The CFDC's top man, Michael Spencer, counters that this rule was negotiated with the industry at the incorporation of the CFDC to protect the creative side of the industry,

Having worked as an historical researcher, a community organizer, and a full-time staff reporter, Joan Irving is presently a freelance writer living in Montreal.



Director Theodore J. Flicker chatting with production director Michèle Boudrias and first assistant director Mireille Goulet



Jacob Two-Two (Stephen Rosenberg) comforting his lawyer Louis Loser (Victor Desy), who has never won a case

and that in any case, the CFDC does not believe it must invest in every feature made in Canada.

"I wasn't pleading a special favor," says Gulkin. "It just seems to me that literary properties by Canadian writers of stature should be kept here. Take *Rachel Rachel* by Margaret Laurence; that was a spectacular loss. *Jacob Two-Two* might have been made in L.A.; now it become a part of Canadian film history."

The film did find private investors. Nevertheless, Gulkin says he had a fairly horrendous time pulling the financing together. "Some of the money didn't come in until the 11th day of shooting. There were many times when the production might have fallen apart had it not been for the personal risks my American partners and I took.

"Independent filmmaking is a perilous occupation; you have to have the stomach for it."

In the final financial arrangement, two-thirds of the investment money was raised in Canada, with Famous Players one of the major investors. "George Destounis went out on a limb for the project," Gulkin says. "It was a question of his understanding our problems and supporting us because he felt the project would go somewhere." For their trouble, Famous Players will be first in line to release the film in Canada. Christmas is the anticipated release date, which means that the film will have been eight months in production. Gulkin is hustling to outlive the legacy of *Lies My Father Told Me*, a film which was almost five years in production.

Speaking of finances, I was curious to know how the million-dollar-plus budget was being spent.

The greatest costs were the crew—it was a basic 52-member crew, including two camera and electrical crews—and the cost of locations and set dressing. Special effects ("We were inventing special effects like it was the beginning of movies," Flicker commented at one moment) were also a large expense.

Ted Flicker had requested two cameras covering each performance by the children for fear that they would get

tired and bored from repeated takes. The two electrical crews did not work at the same location; because of the pressure of the shooting schedule, the electrical swing crew pre-lit the next location.

Director of photography François Protat (*La tête de Normande St. Onge*) says the two-camera technique caused some problems with lighting. "It was hard to do really interesting lighting. The lights of one camera would interfere with the field of the other camera. We went crazy with that, also because we had to work so fast."

Funny, he didn't mention the heat!

It was Protat's first feature in English. I questioned him about the use of English and the working atmosphere on the set.

"Language was not a big problem; it was less embarrassing than I imagined it would be. Anyway, sometimes it's better not to understand the director perfectly well..."

"Mr. Flicker was perhaps used to older technicians; we were a young crew, but he got used to us after awhile. I found working with him very interesting—he was organized and knew how to run a set with a large crew. There isn't any director in Quebec who really knows how to handle such a large crew and get everybody working together effectively. Flicker was a professional. With him I felt I was working 100 per cent—he understood my problems because he knew his business."

Protat suggested, somewhat cautiously, that he would like to have more opportunities to work on Canadian films directed by non-Canadians. "Our industry is young, we have good crews and technical resources but there seems to be a problem with directors and writers who lack professionalism."

"Full-blown Fellinis the first time they make a film," were Gulkin's words when he got worked up on the subject of the Canadian film industry. But that's more fuel for a continuing debate.

As for *Jacob Two-Two*, I'm waiting to find out if he got his chocolate ice cream. There's no doubt Stephen Rosenberg got his. □