

NIGHT RAIDERS

CHALLENGES THE WAY INDIGENOUS PEOPLE ARE REPRESENTED ON SCREEN



Brooklyn Letexier-Hart and Elle-Máijá Tailfeathers in *Night Raiders*

A mother-daughter duo is the heart of Cree-Métis filmmaker Danis Goulet's dystopian film

KELLY BOUTSALIS (she/her)

THERE ISN'T ANYTHING MORE HORRIFYING THAN a parent watching her child being ripped away from her, and that's the premise of the dystopian sci-fi film *Night Raiders*.

In the grim and pulse-quickening feature, Niska (Ella-Máijá Tailfeathers) is a Cree mother whose main focus is on protecting her daughter Waseese (Brooklyn Letexier-Hart) from detection by the drones that haunt the skies. The army of drones searches for children to bring into the State Academies, where they will be militarized.

Together they live in the bush, hunting for food and living in a ramshackle bus, before an accident forces the mother-daughter duo into the run-down city for care. From there, everything that Niska cares for begins to unravel and she winds up begrudgingly leading a vigilante crew of Cree people.

Directed and written by Danis Goulet, the debut feature of the Cree-Métis writer/filmmaker from northern Saskatchewan takes the history of residential schools – the forced removal of Indigenous children from their homes to attend institutions to “civilize” them – and brings it into a not-too-distant future. In *Night Raiders*, however, it's not just Indigenous children who are scooped up by the state.

The mother-daughter relationship is at the core of the film and those roles are played with restraint and care by Blackfoot-Sami actor/director Tailfeathers (most recently seen in Jeff Barnaby's horror film *Blood Quantum*, and her own film *The Body Remembers When the World Broke Open*) and by Oji-Cree actor Letexier-Hart, known for her work on TV's *Burden of Truth*.

This fall *Night Raiders* will tour to Cree communities in Ontario, Manitoba and Saskatchewan thanks to a partnership between Canada Media Fund, MADE | NOUS, Elevation Pictures and Stories First. The five-stop tour will see the film screened in remote Cree

communities ensuring they have opportunities to see the film, showcasing the many ways in which filmmaking and storytelling can help share their culture and language with the world.

Star Cineplex talked with Letexier-Hart, who was 13 at the time of shooting the film, when she was in town for the Toronto International Film Festival. She told us that while the themes of assimilation and trauma were heavy, Goulet created a safe and nurturing environment.

She added that in working closely with Tailfeathers, she gained a mentor.

“She's very like powerful and she took on a nurturing, mothering role, and it definitely helped with the filming and the connection between the two characters, Waseese and Niska, as mother and daughter,” said Letexier-Hart.

“Basically, we talked everything through with the scenes, what the two characters are going through, and we made a personal connection so our performances feel more natural and authentic.”

Night Raiders marks the first-ever Canadian and New Zealand co-production, with Taika Waititi (*Jojo Rabbit*) and Chelsey Winstanley (*Jojo Rabbit*) on board as executive producer and producer, respectively, and Māori-Niuean-Samoan actor Alex Tarrant playing a Maori character in the film.

“It was so beautiful seeing the connection between the two cultures and learning about the Maori culture and meeting some new people,” said Letexier-Hart.

As she wrapped up the interview, with plans to head back to her home province of British Columbia, she had a last thought for what she wants audiences to take away from *Night Raiders*.

“I hope the Indigenous people feel seen and heard, and it's great the way that this story was portrayed in Indigenous sci-fi, it can reach different audiences,” she says. “I hope not just Indigenous people leave the movie feeling like they learned some things.”

NIGHT RAIDERS

STARRING: ELLE-MÁIJÁ TAILFEATHERS, BROOKLYN LETEXIER-HART, ALEX TARRANT, AMANDA PLUMMER AND VIOLET NELSON.

DIRECTED BY: DANIS GOULET. **RELEASE DATE:** NOVEMBER 25, 2021. **RATED:** PG-13.