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## Professors see similarities to Ewoks in 1978 script

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CALGARY

Two professors at the University of Calgary testified Monday there are striking similarities between the Ewok characters in George Lucas' film *Return of the Jedi* and the furry creatures of the same name in a script written by a Calgary man.

James Dugan, an actor and head of the university's drama department, said the characters are similar enough that they cannot have been created independently.

"The very similar general description and habits of the creatures seem to defy coincidence," he said.

Dugan was testifying at a lawsuit filed by Dean Preston, a Calgary writer who says he created the Ewok characters in 1978, five years before they appeared in Lucas' lucrative *Star Wars* trilogy.

Dugan said that if both Lucas and Preston were his pupils in a screenwriting class, he would question Lucas' integrity. "If I had received *Space Pets* from Preston as a final project in 1978 and *Return of the Jedi* in 1981,

I would bring Lucas before the dean on a charge of plagiarism," he said.

English professor Janis Svilpis, who teaches science-fiction writing, also described the resemblance between Lucas' Ewoks and the bear-like creatures found in Preston's *Space Pets* script.

"Given that *Space Pets* and *Return of the Jedi* are closely related, and given that no common source for both is easily visible, it is somewhat more probable ... that *Space Pets* is the source text for *Return of the Jedi* rather than the reverse," said Svilpis.

Both men were presented as expert witnesses by A. Webster MacDonald, Preston's lawyer in the \$150-million suit against Lucas. Both read from reports they prepared comparing Preston's script and Lucas' movie.

The reports noted the Ewoks and Preston's furry characters were similar in appearance, had primitive cultures, used spears and rocks as weapons, and lived in tree huts connected by vines and walkways.

Preston says he mailed the *Space Pets* script to Lucas but received no reply and the script was never returned.

Lucas says Ewoks evolved from the eight-

foot, bellowing Wookiee character in the original *Star Wars* script he wrote in 1974. Testifying last week, the bearded filmmaker also said his company has a strict policy of returning all unsolicited scripts unopened.

Lucas' lawyer, W. Graham Dutton, wrangled with Svilpis over the professor's calculations that there are only 1,274 chances in 100 trillion that both Preston and Lucas could imagine the same name for their creation.

"You're being silly," Dutton said of Svilpis's calculation.

The derivation of the word *Ewok* has been a central issue in the lawsuit.

Preston says the name was born while he was playing with phonetics and the phrase "he walks." Lucas testified the name was derived from switching around the letters of the word *Wookiee* and his musings about the Miwok (pronounced Meewok) Indian tribe of northern California.

Dugan refused to accept Lucas' testimony.

"I don't get that as a short step," he told Dutton. "It doesn't sound to me that obvious."

Named in the suit are Lucas, Lucasfilm Ltd. and 20th Century Fox Canada Ltd.

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