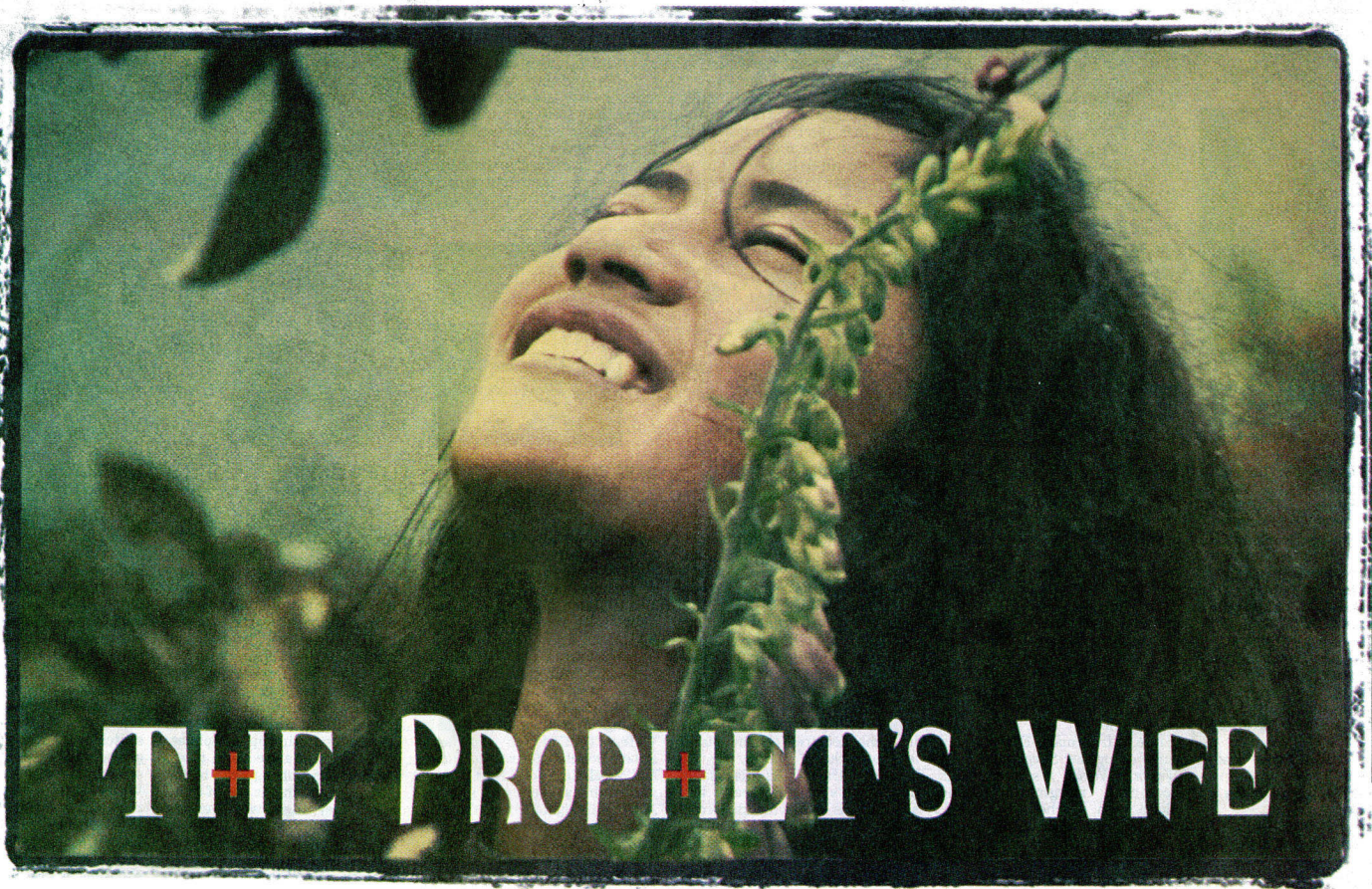
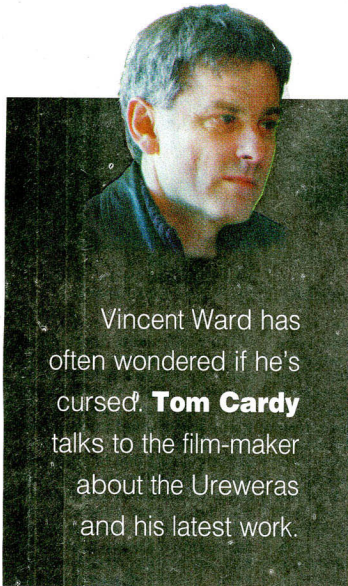


Entertainment



THE PROPHET'S WIFE



Vincent Ward has often wondered if he's cursed. **Tom Cardy** talks to the film-maker about the Ureweras and his latest work.

THIRTY years ago, a novice film-maker called Vincent Ward was about to head to a remote part of the Ureweras to document the life of an elderly Tuhoe woman and her schizophrenic son.

He was sharing a flat in Wellington and just before he was about to leave, the flat burned to the ground. As he watched one of his flatmates leap from a window to safety, all he could think was: "Have I left the film negative in my room?"

Luckily the film survived the blaze. So he got in his van and headed to the Ureweras.

On the way the van caught fire. It was towed into Taupo and he had to buy another car to continue on his journey to what would eventually become the acclaimed documentary *In Spring One Plants Alone*.

Ward spent months with 80-year-old Puhi and her 40-year-old son Niki filming them. It was

tough going — he caught ringworm and had conjunctivitis. More than once Ward jokingly thought: "Am I cursed?"

But the film put Ward in the spotlight as a singular new talent in New Zealand film. He followed it with *A State of Siege* — based on the Janet Frame novel — and the feature *Vigil* — a later inspiration for many film-makers, including *Whale Rider* director Niki Caro.

His other films have included *The Navigator*, *What Dreams May Come* with Robin Williams and the trouble-plagued *River Queen*. He was also a writer on *Alien 3* and the concept for *The Last Samurai*, later shot in New Plymouth, and starring Tom Cruise.

But with his latest feature, *Rain of the Children*, Ward has come full circle. He went back to the Ureweras, sometimes, like he did 30 years ago, with only a camera for company, to look more deeply into the life of Puhi and Niki.

In the new film — a mix of documentary and dramatised segments — we learn much about Puhi's tumultuous and often shocking life. Ward, discovered that some Tuhoe believed

'What happened was I felt haunted by this woman in all the years since she'd died. Things about her story unsettled me. I needed to know more about why she was who she was.'

— Vincent Ward

Puhi — and those near her — were cursed.

Ward started work on *Rain of the Children* before *River Queen*, then returned to interviewing people. "I always thought, even making the original film, that there were two films there. There was a little, intimate film I made in 1978, which is one I decided to do. And there was a much bigger film — very dramatic in scale and intimacy.

"What happened was I felt haunted by this woman in all the years since she'd died. Things about her story unsettled me. I needed to know more about why she was who she was."

What Ward uncovers is remarkable. Historical scenes filmed in the region, featuring Rena Owen as Puhi, are enhanced by some big-scale visual effects, including contributions from Weta Digital.

When Puhi was 12, she was chosen by Tuhoe prophet Rua Kenana to marry his son and changed her name to Puhi or "special one". At age 14, she gave birth to her first child while hiding in the bush, after escaping a 1916 police raid on Kenana's community in Maungapohatu. She went on to have 13 more children, two more husbands and, as the film reveals, experience many more dramatic events.

Despite it being a New Zealand story, overseas audiences and critics have

been responding as positively to *Rain of the Children* as they have in advance screenings here — and winning best original music at the Qantas Film and Television Awards last week-

end. Influential entertainment industry magazines *The Hollywood Reporter* and *Variety* praised the doco-drama, and it beat 250 films to win the grand prix at the New Horizons Film Festival in Poland.

More film festivals include the competition at the Hawaii Film Festival and the Chicago Film Festival where, coincidentally, in 1980 *In Spring One Plants Alone* won an award.

"In the original film you can sense there's something underneath it. I knew bits and pieces of it, but I hadn't put it all together. It wasn't until I went back."



RAIN
OF THE
CHILDREN

■ *Rain of the Children* is screening now. Wellington Film Society will screen *In Spring One Plants Alone* and *A State of Siege* at the