Make no bones about it: dinosaurs are him

kid Peter May swears he

essed the day his teachers
dinosaurs. It must have

er he left Oldham, a city

chester, England, and

 began Grade 4 at
nn's Lloyd George ele-

one a bit of catching up.

clear when you enter

warehouse on Union

asville, the one

ake rock outside in-

ith Mayan art and

us sign that reads

 Flintstones script.

’t find a tabloid

newspaper anywhere inside.

This day’s reading is the book

Creating Life-Like Animals in

olymer Clay. A humpback

whale skeleton lays in a steel

ame. Glance up and a towering

losaurus bares finger-long

serrated teeth as if the Jurassic

period’s come back to life.

Jurassic giants:

photo feature Go 14

It has for the 48-year-old.
fter graduating from Barton

Secondary he studied sculpting

iversity of Guelph. Then

came stints at the Royal Ontario

useum bookending his work

 the founding of the Royal

rell Museum of Palaeontology in Drumheller, Alta.

DINOMAN: A8
**DINOMAN:**

One of the world's top dinosaur builders

Continued from A1

In 1987, faced with requests for plenty of outside work while at the ROM, he founded Research Casting International. Now, it's one of the world's top dinosaur builders.

"We have the highest free-standing dinosaurs in the world," May says on a tour of the 18,000-square-foot building he expanded into in 1998. He's talking about the five-storey-tall Sarosaurus he built for the American Museum of Natural History in New York. Piled on its back legs to defend its young, it stands 15 metres tall and 24 metres long. It weighs a tonne - a fraction of what it would in real life.

Over the past 25 years, May has helped build more than 400 dinosaur skeletons for museums in Canada, the U.S., Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and Japan. And RCRI - the museum side of May's $5 million or so theatre-prop- and-dino-skeleton empire - even built skeletons for Steven Spielberg's movie Jurassic Park.

As May talks, his staff polishes and then packs a long-rocketed Diploсидus and its Allosaurus attacker into wood crates bound for Moscot City Hall in Korea.

Korea's penchant for work recently, about 15 to 20 dino in total.

On another job, May was in China about four times, and has done lots of work in Japan.

With 17 employees - largely fine artists, grad students, then a blacksmith - RCRI mounts actual fossils, bones or moulds of bones made with a strong, lightweight polymer.

Their "great lizards" and mammoths snap together on a springy framework of steel rods and interlocking keys that May developed. They cost $2,000 to $120,000 US to build, and then take on some great adventures.

Such as his first interview at the ROM, when he fell asleep after reading about paleontology in the Encyclopedia Britannica the night before. He knew next to nothing about dinosaurs but was intrigued by an interviewer who asked, "Do you like camping? Do you know how to drive a four-by-four?"

He began as a junior technician doing casting and moulding for the vertebrate paleontology department.

Or the odd calls, like the one he got in late 2001 about a beachhutt that died on the Magellan Islands. May had to get his crew out east quickly, to get it, skin it and gather the rare whale's bones. All this, before a coming storm hit the beach and washed the animal back to sea. Its bones, soaking in RCRI's wading pool, will be part of a ROM marine exhibit several years from now.

But there's another side to May's scientifically precise dino-building, an offshoot to the buttoned-down resume that lets him sell world-class museums on a shopping list of t-rexes, crocs, raptors, mammals and more than 40 types of dinosaurs.

Sure, May handled a rush in the museum world for T-Rex models after the world's largest and complete fossil, Sue, was found and sold for $8.4 million US. But the flashiest work he's done - the kind some museum curators bristle at - has to be the T-Rex and Allosaurus he built for Spielberg's 1993 blockbuster Jurassic Park.

In 1997, May read in the paper that Spielberg was making a movie about dinosaurs. "I sent a letter to Amblin (Spielberg's company) with our portfolio in case they needed us," May says. It turns out, they did.

So May went to Hollywood to mount the Tyrannosaurus attacking an Alamosaurus. He met Spielberg, found him pleasant and excited about dinosaurs but quite busy with the shooting schedule. The models were rigged with explosives, cables attached to their rib cages and exposed to five cameras trained on them to capture the scene.

It was the kind of exposure that would later put May's models in a Jurassic Park show at New York's natural history museum the same day as the movie's U.S. premiere. A second set of his great lizards toured overseas.

"It was a one-shot deal," May says of the film scene, which sent his massive models crashing to the floor in pieces during a hair-raising chase sequence.

Still, as a dinosaur-builder, the challenge was something May doesn't want to cope with off screen. "It's certainly something you don't want to see."