David Winning's
Storm

Montreal's World Film Festival is notorious for its nearly hysterical edge of movielogic madness — for its sold-out screenings, and for the long, smoky waits endured in order to see completely unknown films on the basis of a rumor of a rumor.

So it was certainly a shock to have to watch David Winning's film, Storm, with five people in an otherwise empty theatre. Scheduling did not help the film — late on a Tuesday night, in the least prestigious of the festival's screening halls (an enormous theatre/classroom arena on the campus of Concordia University). But, at a festival like this one, the time and the place of a screening do not usually seem to make much of a difference.

Yet one has to wonder if the simple fact that this is an unknown Canadian film was in itself enough to discourage people. While an unknown American, Bulgarian, or Australian film would have been sold out, an unknown Canadian film stands not a chance. I find this incredibly depressing. Have our expectations of the Canadian cinema really sunk that low?

For this low-budget, shoestring feature manages to be almost a casebook study of the preoccupations of the Canadian imagination, at least according to Margaret Atwood's Survival. Storm is a survivalist story, that of a modern, urban adolescent's discovery of the wilderness and the savagery within himself that has to emerge for him to be able to deal with this environment. In the process, the youth changes from a child to a man; whether, as a result of this transformation, he is better equipped to do anything other than survive or simply seem to make much of a difference.

But Winning has an unfortunate tendency to give in to the easy effect: a hallucination which will shock the viewer the first time finally becomes silly if it is repeated too often. He over-relied as well on a soundtrack which absolutely insists on underlining every emotion the viewer is supposed to feel.

If Winning opted ultimately for slickness, it's because there's really a void at the film's center. The script is formulaic, and the characters are under-developed: a trio of largely dislikeable old murderers returns to the woods to dig up money which they had hidden years before, while a couple of immature young men come to experience the wilderness. The youths and the oldtimers engage in mortal combat. While there are some nice surprises here — a villain so nasty but so vulnerable to a heart attack that he can barely chase his victims — the only character we really get to know at all is so dumb and uninteresting that his heroic transformation from nerd to a kind of Rambo is mainly in-comprehensible. The script, in short, is missing a heart. The film becomes an exercise in conflict, tension and style.

Yet Storm is a slick, professional-looking, low-budget, thriller, but without tension and not without charm. It will look good on TV and is probably best viewed in that context because there is simply not enough human substance here to create in the viewer the empathy and concentration characteristic of a really successful film experience.

But I think David Winning might be going somewhere in the film's direction. For a director so incredibly young, Storm is a considerable professional accomplishment. I look forward to seeing what he accomplishes in the future.

Brian Lewis •

STORM


Quel numéro/What Number?
The Electronic Sweatshop

Anna, filmmaker, delivers a cinematic message to a departed lover. Her moments with the camera, intercut with fast flashes as she recalls the "obession, passion and ecstacy," exposes some of the problems and dilemmas of today's woman. Full of energy and talent, wanting to make a mark in her profession — yet striving to preserve a private, intimate personal life — Anna struggles and suffers.

The camera loves Linda Griffiths (the Maggie and Pierre actress) and, without her, one's attention would flag. This good-looking debut film from Patricia Rozema falls down on its script. Susan Birdl's phrasing as "an exquisite ache," "the sublime madness," and "perhaps what it all is about me is saying to you without fear or blame, it is over," at the finish, serve to emphasize that the writing leaves much to be desired.

Griffiths' shining performance is the mainstay here — a lesser actress would have fumbled in the words. It's to be hoped that the interpretation was decided upon between this talented player and the director. However, it's fair to say that this ambitious first film, with good production values squeezed out of (one guesses) a small budget, certainly engenders an anticipatory feeling for the next one.

With saw in hand, he watches in utter delight. Failing asleep in front of the screen, he misses the emergency announcement of a worldwide nuclear war!

The husband awakes and ignores the noise of panic in the streets, and the noise of his wife vacuuming the bathroom, including tub and taps, and the inside of a large cupboard. She returns to the Scrabble game, and accuses her husband of looking at her letters. He counters with yells of, "You're always shaking your eyes!" She bellows, "Stop saving the table," while the husband attempts to conceal his pet saw.

The shooting match peaks, the wife rushes out in tears. Attempting a reconciliation, the husband goes into the hall and plays his concertina to soothe and serenade her. Overcome with loving emotion, they make up and, unaware of the disintegrating world, open the door to go outside.

Another winner from Richard Condie, the talented animator who gave us the procrastinating teenager in Getting Started, and the prolific bugs smuggled through Customs in PIGBIRD. The wonderfully detailed drawing and bizarre characters serve to heighten and punch across the idea of what really constitutes The Big Snit. The human emotions displayed, though small in comparison, are every bit as earth-shattering as the earth itself. That's one easy interpretation, but there are many others to be deduced from this little animated film, which may even lead to a new national diversion — saving!