

## On Location

### Winnipeg Archangel

There's this strange building in the West End of Winnipeg which used to be the main headquarters for Marshall Well's Hardware. Now, it's a multi-tenant dwelling which houses a clothing wholesaler, two furniture stores, a skateboard rink, and a firearms dealer. Buried deep in the bowels of this odd exterior is something even stranger: 10,000 square feet of expressionistic streets, buildings, trenches, and battlefields.

This is the Winnipeg studio of Ordnance Motion Pictures Inc., a Manitoban production company which is in the process of creating something very odd, indeed. A small crew is bustling about, taking direction from one of this country's most original filmmakers, Guy Maddin. Maddin, age 32, is directing his second feature film, *Archangel*, which he describes as being a comedy and a drama "about love, sex, death, and war - all of my favorite subjects."

"Today is your lucky day," says producer Greg Klymkiw. "If you'd come on-set yesterday, it would've been pretty ho-hum. But today we're shooting some really excellent violence."

Maddin seems somewhat more reserved than his chain-smoking, porcine partner. "Yeah, we're shooting some violent stuff today but it's really the only graphic violence in the whole movie. The film is basically a love story," says Maddin.

I ask if I can see a copy of the script. Klymkiw snaps his fingers, and a production assistant comes racing over. "Do we have a script around?" Klymkiw asks. The P.A. complies, and soon I'm reading the scene which is being shot.

According to the script, a character by the name of Jannings witnesses three psychotic Bolsheviks murdering his baby and torturing his son. Jannings springs into action, but is disemboweled. Apparently, he picks his intestines up off the floor, stuffs them back into his stomach, and proceeds to kill the Bolsheviks. Sounds good to me. While Maddin and company scurry about to get ready for the first shot, I settle back into a chair and read the cover-page synopsis of the film.

*Archangel*, it appears, is set during the Russian Revolution and deals with a strange *ménage à trois* in which a Canadian soldier, a Russian nurse, and a Belgian aviator are so clouded over by mustard gas and severe memory disorders that they keep forgetting who they're in love with at any given moment. Later on, I ask Maddin if there's any historical basis for this film, and he tells me that during World War One, there actually were a handful of Canadian soldiers from Manitoba who were stationed in



Sarah Neville (Danchuk) and Kyle McCulloch (Lt. John Boles) in Guy Maddin's *Archangel*.

the Russian city of Archangel. Apparently they were there to help the White Russians battle the Kaiser's Huns and Lenin's Bolsheviks.

"Will that be enough?" Maddin asks. "I'm kind of busy. Why don't you talk to my producer?"

It's no wonder Maddin is busy. Aside from being the director, he is also the co-writer, the director of photography, the art director, the production designer, and during post-production, he will also be serving as the editor and sound editor.

"Guy kind of likes it that way," explains producer Klymkiw. "He needs a small, but skilled crew and lots of breathing room." Klymkiw explains that the budget for the film is around \$350,000. "It's the perfect budget for artist-driven filmmaking. That's what this country needs more of. Hell, for three million bucks, I could produce 10 features, and it bet you anything that even if five of them were dogs, at least four of them would be fairly big critical successes, and at least one of them could be a substantial commercial success."

Klymkiw doesn't dismiss bigger budgets,

altogether. "Sure, there'll always be room for bigger budgeted pictures aimed squarely at a commercial market, but it just seems to me that the films which really put this country on the map are the smaller budgeted art films. Look at *Mermaids* or *Family Viewing* or even Guy's last film, *Gimli Hospital*."

Klymkiw believes that the real problem in Canada is poor distribution. "Yeah sure, most of these clowns can handle an American pick-up with a huge promotion and advertising budget, but throw an art film at them, and you can see the mush come pouring out of their ears. A lot of these distributors are lazy morons who won't, or can't, or don't know how to take the time to handle a small picture correctly." Klymkiw agrees that distribution problems for art films are not exclusive to Canada, but argues that because public funds are being used to bolster distribution in the country, there is no excuse for this "sorry state." However, he cites Maddin's distributor, Cinephile's André Bennett, as the "perfect example" of a distributor who "pushes the strangest, weirdest, most wonderfully offbeat stuff until he's blue in the face. Bennett's

a fighter. Most of the others just toss in the Canadian stuff as homevideo fodder while they pump the hell out of the American stuff."

The financing for *Archangel* was raised through several sources: Telefilm Canada, The Canada Council, The Manitoba Arts Council, and the Canada-Manitoba Cultural Industries Development Office (CIDO). Klymkiw claims he is particularly pleased with Telefilm's participation. "At first I figured this wasn't the kind of picture they were looking for, and I must admit that I stupidly thought they'd be a royal pain in the ass." Klymkiw points out, however, that Telefilm has been a Godsend. "I hear low-budget, independent filmmakers always complaining about Telefilm. They're always saying that there's too much red-tape and bullshit and that there'll be too much artistic interference. That's a bunch of hogwash!!! Yeah, there's red-tape and yeah, there's bureaucracy and yeah, there's tons of paperwork, but so what? The're equity investors, right? Besides, I can honestly say that this picture wouldn't be happening if it weren't for Telefilm. At least it wouldn't be happening at this level of financing."

Klymkiw explains that while the film is considered ultra-low-budget by everyone else's standards, "it's a bloody mega-budget for Guy Maddin. People keep forgetting his last feature cost only thirty G's. 350-grand for us is like having the budget for *Gandhi*."

Soon, Maddin and his crew are shooting the disemboweling scene. It's pretty disgusting, but it appears to be a resounding success. The crew is cheering after the first take. The actor, Michael Gottli (who starred as Gunnar in *Gimli Hospital*) is covered in uncooked link sausages, chocolate syrup, and milk. "That's gonna look great in black and white," says Klymkiw. "There are clowns out there who would spend thousands of dollars to get that effect. We're getting something even better for about a hundred bucks. Low-budgets. Man, that's where it's at."

Ian Handford •

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