

Fight for life film opens festival

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Princes in Exile, opening the Atlantic Film Festival, is a moving, fairly understated film about a teenage boy learning how to live with impending death.

The movie is not gloomy despite its subject, its embittered hero and its setting — a camp for teenagers with cancer. Despite predictable plot elements and melodramatic moments, it is not overly sentimental. You will cry, though.

Princes in Exile, a National Film Board/Cinepix Inc. production, opens the 10th annual Atlantic Film Festival Sept. 25, 7 p.m., at Park Lane Cinema. The screening is a benefit for the Canadian Cancer Society - Nova Scotia division and its Camp Goodtime.

In Princes in Exile, shot in Quebec, the hero heals his mind, taking a journey from isolating self-pity and cynicism to a hopeful stance that helps him live more fully while he can.

Princes in Exile has the feel of a good made-for-TV movie. Told through the eyes of the kids, it is happily free of Hollywood melodrama and cheap, sugary tugs at the heart. Instead it is a tender, serious and realistic portrait.

The film jumps out of an unusual union between Cinepix's John Dunning, producer of the Canadian comedy Meatballs and the NFB's Giles Walker, director of NFB's popular, alternative drama

comedies, The Male Mystique, 90 Days and The Last Straw. Halifax's Kent Nason, of the National Film Board -Atlantic, was the cinematographer.

Dunning asked Walker to read the book Princes in Exile, by

Cincinnati author Mark Schreiber, written when he was 20. Walker's visit to Paul Newman's

retreat for terminally ill children, The Hole in the Wall Camp, convinced him to direct the movie, shot the summer of 1989 in Kamp Kanawana, a YMCA camp near St. Sauveur; Mount St. Bruno Provincial Park and at NFB's Montreal sound stage. Expert makeup makes kid actors look like they have cancer; it was decided it would be too stressful to use real kids.

The hero Ryan, portrayed with a haunting intensity and vulnerability by Vancouver actor Zachary Ansley, is a shy, intellectual 17-year-old who has two goals — to complete his despairing poetic journal and to lose his virginity before he dies.

At Camp Hawkins he encounters Robert the Stuntman (Nicholas Shields), a daredevil with leukemia who believes in fighting death everyday with vigorous life, and Holly (Stacie Mistysyn, who is

Caitlin on Degraassi High), a girl who has lost one of her lower legs to cancer but remains optimistic.

Some metaphors, in this quite heavily metaphorical movie, for death and cancer are good; some are overdone.

In general it is shot with sensitivity and not too much sappiness.



Cinepix Inc.

As Holly, Stacie Mistysyn, who is Caitlin on CBC-TV's Degraassi High, befriends a teenager with terminal cancer, the hero of the Canadian movie Princes in Exile, opening the Atlantic Film Festival tonight at 7 p.m., at Park Lane Cinema.