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Princes in Exile an unforgettable movie that shouldn't be missed



Flipping through the *TV Times* tomorrow night, viewers will come across a listing for a Canadian film called *Princes in Exile*. Their interest piqued, many will read the blurb, go "hmmm" and decide not to watch it.

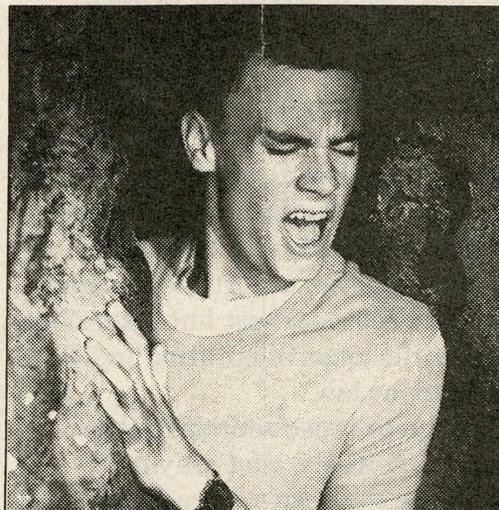
"Too depressing," they might say, scanning the schedule for something else. And that will be their loss.

Because *Princes in Exile*, a Cinepix-National Film Board production that CBC is running at 8 p.m. Sunday, falls into the must-see viewing category for parents and kids old enough to stay up for it.

On the surface, it is the story of youngsters at a summer camp for kids with cancer. Below the surface, it is a rich and moving tale of vitality — with a surprising share of smiles and laughter.

Directed by the NFB's Giles Walker from a novel by U.S. writer Mark Schreiber, *Princes in Exile* made its debut in August at the Montreal International Film Festival, where Joe Wiesenfeld picked up the prize for best screenplay. Tomorrow night marks its first television showing.

The story revolves around 17-year-old Ryan Rafferty (Zachary Ansley) and the friends he makes during his stay at Camp Hawkins (which some viewers may recognize as the YM-CA's popular Kamp Kanawana in the Laurentians). An aspiring writer, Ryan is shy, introspective — and bitter about the card fate has dealt him: a brain tumor that spells the



Zachary Ansley in *Princes in Exile*.

premature end of his dreams and visions.

It is during his stay at the camp, where (in spite of himself) he forges friendships based on rare bonds, that he gains a new perspective on the life he has remaining.

The journey of discovery is hauntingly portrayed — from the opening scene when Ryan tries to escape through a malignant-seeming forest, to the finale when, no longer on the run, he can appreciate the soft peacefulness of the same setting.

In between, he comes to know many friends who share much of his pain, frustration and (to outsiders) slightly black sense of humor. There are, for instance, his cabin mates, five boys suffering from five other kinds of cancer. These are his fellow "princes in exile," heirs to a

rich future from which they have been banished. It is from daredevil Robert (Nicholas Shields) that Ryan picks up the most moving life-lesson.

Then there's Holly (played by De-grassi High's Gemini Award-winning Stacie Mistysyn), who knows how to laugh. And Gabriel (Alexander Chapman), who knows about the power of the mind. And Dr. Merritt (veteran Canadian actor Chuck Shamoto), who knows all about the wisdom of acceptance and hope.

In fact, it's Merritt who sets the tone of the movie during his welcome speech to the young campers.

"This is a camp," he tells them, "not a cancer ward with trees."

And this is a camp film, in many ways — full of the joys and wackiness of kids' summers away from home. Except that there's an ever-present second agenda, one that explores with realism and compassion and very little sentimentality the special concerns of these special campers: the nature of pity and self-pity, the fears, the pain, the intricate possibilities of joy in the present.

"We're here for a good time," says Robert to his mates, "not a long time."

All that is possible in that good time is what drives the film.

And it's what makes *Princes in Exile* a sad, glad, exhilarating and ultimately unforgettable work — one that shouldn't be passed over on a Sunday evening.