

TV Reviews

'Princes in Exile' Drama Aimed at Teens

A summer camp alongside a lake, full of teen-agers facing imminent death, in a low-budget film shot in Canada. . . . This, of course, describes all the "Friday the 13th" movies, but it's also the scenario for a more serious rumination on teen mortality, the cancer-themed drama "Princes in Exile."

After limited theatrical release in a few cities last year, the film—adapted by Joe Wiesenfeld from a novel by Mark Schreiber—has its television premiere tonight on the USA Network at 9 p.m.

It's a sensitive, relatively unsentimental treatment of a difficult subject, primarily aimed—in the best "Afterschool Special" fashion—at the youthful demographic being portrayed. "Princes in Exile" avoids many of the usual pitfalls of disease-of-the-week TV movies by having almost *all* its characters similarly afflicted. They're kids spending the summer at Camp Hawkins, a compound devoted exclusively to cancer patients in various stages of remission.

Most of the teens are on the cheerful side, a sullen exception being Ryan (Zachary Ansley), who's waxing understandably morbid over what looks to be a fatal brain tumor. Naturally, in time Ryan will get with the program and loosen up like his cabin-mates. Fortunately, these potentially artificial conflicts aren't over-dramatized, and the ways in which Ryan relearns a tentative love of life—a budding romance with a sweet fellow sufferer, participation in a camp talent show, etc.—are simple but don't defy credibility.

Dialogue treads the self-conscious but realistic line between cynicism and romanticism. (Ogling a volunteer nurse, Ryan warns himself in voice-over, "She's beautiful, looks 23 and probably dates neurosurgeons. I'm 17, nearly bald and dying.") "Princes in Exile" won't hold many surprises for adults, but it's a good chance to expose teens to the eminent touchability of afflicted peers.

(The film also airs Sunday at 7 p.m. and Dec. 7 at 2 p.m.)

—CHRIS WILLMAN