

FILM REVIEWS / CRITIQUES DE FILMS

LESSONS IN SURVIVAL — A LOOK AT *FAR FROM HOME: THE ADVENTURES OF YELLOW DOG*

Far From Home: The Adventures of Yellow Dog. Twentieth Century Fox, 1995. 81 minutes, colour. Written and directed by Phillip Borsos.

A boat trip up the coast of Vancouver Island turns to tragedy when rough weather hits, capsizing the vessel, and stranding two of its occupants — fourteen-year-old Angus McCormick and his dog, Yellow — on the remote shoreline, beginning a nineteen-day struggle for survival.

Far From Home is an American/Canadian collaboration that, although not flawless, combines the best of both film styles. The influence of Los Angeles may be felt in the pacing of a tightly-constructed plot which moves expertly, if predictably, from expository sequences that establish character and foreshadow conflict, to a climax riveting enough to satisfy the appetite of an audience weaned on the Hollywood action movie.

The film's Canadian influence may be felt in its subtle characterization, reflective of a more introverted and understated national character. Angus is an attentive, responsible and respectful boy whose often banal words and hesitant demeanour allow us to believe that he is a real adolescent and not the caricature of a teen, delivering witty one-liners and solving the world's problems in eighty minutes. We believe in this boy and welcome the respite from his cocky American counterpart. A further Canadian influence may be felt in the film's portrayal of nature. Nature here is vast, impersonal and uncompromising. Sweeping helicopter views of impenetrable forest, which reduce boy and dog to mere specks, remind us that we are only part of something much greater.

Although fast-paced, genuine and even profound, the film is not flawless. There are indeed moments when our credulity is tested. We wonder, for example, how John McCormick, nature guru, could expose his son to such danger in the first place. Anyone could see the sky growing darker and the wind growing stronger. Why doesn't he head for shore sooner? And then there is Angus. How could a boy, equipped only with a pen-knife, build a splint for his own injured arm and then construct a raft, not to mention a lean-to and a mousetrap? I guess "the child [really] is father of the man"! In the end, though, these inconsistencies are accepted and even add to the enjoyment of the film. Angus must, after all, arrive on the beach somehow, and his efforts to endure are relished by the Robinson Crusoe in all of us. In short, *Far From Home* is a carefully crafted film which appeals to the unsophisticated and sophisticated alike, ranging from those who "just like a good story" to those who value honesty in human relations to those who wonder at our place in the universe.

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