

Short

by Tom McSorley

T A K E S

Strange Invaders

2001 9m, prod NFB, p Jennifer Torrance, Cordell Barker, d/an/sc Cordell Barker, s ed Serge Boivin, Shelley Craig, m Luc Préfontaine; with Cordell Barker (voice), Jennifer Torrance (voice), Jackson Barker (voice).

There is a disease, often found in men, which has no name. Let's call it: infant-o-phobia. Winnipeg animator Cordell Barker's latest kinetic, slightly crazed and partly autobiographical cartoon creation goes to straight to the hysterical heart of the paralyzing dystopian fantasies some men experience when they imagine what it would be like to have a child. Set in an unusually fertile suburb filled with babies, *Strange Invaders* chronicles one memorable night when Doris and Roger (an inveterate star gazer and neighbourhood voyeur) have a bout of potentially back-breaking lovemaking. After their exertions, their house is hit by a shooting star that turns out to be an alien toddler. This extraterrestrial intruder (not unlike the feline version in Barker's earlier gem, *The Cat Came Back*) packs a polymorphous punch and soon wreaks havoc on the home, the sleeping patterns of Doris and Roger, and their appliances and their befuddled dog. As the house fairly creaks with entropy, more aliens kiddies arrive. Or do they? Or was it all a dream? Whatever the case, Roger soon realizes that Doris's recent weight gain has nothing to do with food. (So Cordell Barker didn't win the Oscar. He got the baby instead, and that's the biggest prize of all. Or is it?)



Strange Invaders

What these ashes wanted

2001 56m, p/d/ph/ed Philip Hoffman.

The image is not enough, though sometimes, it comes close. Toronto experimental filmmaker Philip Hoffman's most recent film is a rich, densely textured lament for and celebration of his life partner, Marian McMahon, who died suddenly and unexpectedly several years ago. A mosaic of memory, the film weaves together images of McMahon, of their farmhouse before and after, of places visited together and apart, Hoffman's dark intimations of death and a sonic collage of impassioned messages left on the answering machine. There is also a poignant explanation of Hoffman's own role from childhood as the family photographer. Throughout this courageous work, Hoffman investigates the oddness of the processes, technological and otherwise, that we invent in order to remember. At the same moment, he also sanctifies them. More than a strictly personal work that excludes the viewer, Hoffman's film transcends its own intimate power to ponder time itself. Indeed, its diary structure suggests and even demonstrates how the cinema, with images and sounds, can create, destroy and reconstruct temporal experience. *What these ashes wanted* constitutes a poetics of loss, a valentine to the lived paradox of the very real presence of absence. In the elegiac tradition, it is also an affirmation of the tough, sad, beautiful burden we must undertake to care for those who have departed and those who remain.

I Shout Love

2001, 37m, prod Tangled Productions, p Meredith Caplan, d/sc Sarah Polley, ph Luc Montpellier; with Matthew Ferguson, Julian Richings, Kristen Thomson.

Is there anything Sarah Polley can't do? In addition to her ever-expanding, ever-impressive filmography as an actress, Polley is venturing outside the framelines to be a writer/director. Her second short film, *I Shout Love*, is a compelling, occasionally wrenching drama about the end of a relationship. About to be abandoned for another woman, Tessa (Kristen Thomson) convinces her reluctant soon-to-be-ex-boyfriend Bobby (Matthew Ferguson) to re-enact on video significant moments of their relationship. She wants to remember. He wants to leave. Nevertheless, he participates in the performance. It's a fascinating, unsettling and tender one, as Polley blurs the lines between the play-acted reconstructions of the relationship for the camera, and the actual remnants of the relationship itself. While some scenes capture this tension better than others - especially a sequence when the two watch a hockey game - *I Shout Love* is a powerful evocation of emotional distress. There is a broader political theme delivered via televised newscasts; however, it's awkwardly integrated and dilutes the strangeness and intensity of Tessa and Bobby's mediated farewell performance. That minor flaw aside, Polley's film is a brave and mature depiction of the histrionics of emotional desperation. It also reveals, in surprising ways, how the fear of loneliness can spawn, in our technological age, the most peculiar interpersonal rituals of remembrance.