

Contributors

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This is turning out to be a watershed year in the short history of the Canadian feature-film industry. Not yet over, the first nine months of 1998 have seen events and changes unthinkable to the most optimistic observers. To begin the year on a very bright note, Atom Egoyan was nominated for not one but two Oscars, best director and best-adapted screenplay for *The Sweet Hereafter*, the first time a Canadian director had been nominated for a Canadian film. Though Denys Arcand did receive two nominations for *Le Déclin de l'empire américain* and *Jésus de Montréal*, those nominations were for Best Foreign-Language Film, which includes the director, but doesn't come with the same prestige. With the adapted screenplay nomination, Egoyan joined the exclusive club of Canada's three other distinguished nominees, Mordecai Richler and Lionel Chetwain for *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* and Ted Allan for *Lies My Father Told Me*.

Simultaneously, Canadian-born James Cameron won the Best Director Oscar for *Titanic*, the biggest financial success in movie box-office history. It was truly wondrous to note how Cameron was suddenly embraced as Canadian with the success of this film, with lavish tributes at the first annual Niagara Falls Film Festival and a university degree bestowed upon him by Ryerson Polytechnic University in Toronto. Where were these people when *Aliens* and *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* demonstrated Cameron to be a cinematic powerhouse and one of the most influential action directors of his generation? For my money, the action-soaked *T2* is a better film than the water-logged *Titanic*; still, the pride of Kapuskasing, or Niagara Falls—or any other Canadian city that would like to claim him—has made a lot of people very rich and very happy.

Later in the year came the final breakup of Cineplex Odeon (started by the now-disgraced Garth Drabinsky and exhibition pioneer Nat Taylor in 1979) with the sale of its theatres to Sony, and the distribution arm, Cineplex Odeon Films (which started life as Pan-Canadian Film Distributors in 1977), to Alliance Communications. Now known as Odeon Films (nice of them to keep the historic name; the original Odeon theatre chain was bought out by Cineplex in 1984), it remains a stand-alone company within the ever-growing Alliance empire. But, of course, all these events were overshadowed—in terms of importance to the future of the Canadian feature-film industry—by the merger of Alliance Communications with Atlantis Films, thereby creating Alliance Atlantis Communications, Canada's largest film and television independent production company and the 12th largest in North America.

And as if to confirm this change in the business of making films in this country, at a screening of Disney's *Mulan* at my local 'plex this past summer, I saw the first high-voltage ad for an upcoming Canadian attraction—one that is still in production and won't be in theatres until 1999! Of course, it could only be for David Cronenberg's *eXistenZ*, produced by Cronenberg and Robert Lantos for Alliance Atlantis, and aiming to be the most expensive English-Canadian film ever made—certainly the only one with the budget to afford such a fancy trailer. The thrill was palatable. With the outstanding success of *The Sweet Hereafter* and the much anticipated state-of-the-art special effects in Cronenberg's new film, the nature of the beast we fondly like to call Canadian cinema is changing rapidly. The ground has shifted—for the better.

W. P. Wise