

# CANADIAN, EH?

*Take One's unofficial list of* **20**  
*Box-Office Hits*

By Wyndham Wise and Maurie Alioff



Two years ago, in *Take One* No. 19, Spring 1998, we published a list of the 20 best critically acclaimed Canadian features as chosen by our editorial board. In an attempt to balance the ledger, we have now compiled our unofficial list of the Top 20 box-office hits, broken down into two distinct categories: "Industrial Strength Movies" and "International Copros," a category that is further subdivided by majority or minority Canadian ownership.

There is a persistent, well-entrenched perception that Canadian filmmakers are somehow genetically incapable of directing or producing crowd-pleasing, commercial features. Indeed, the most common misconception held about Canadian cinema—and by this I'm primarily talking about English-Canadian cinema—has been its lack of success at the box office. (It's the why-can't-Canadians-make-a-*Full Monty* syndrome.) Of course, a major contributing factor to this misconception is that commercially successful Canadian films are so damn hard to identify, cleverly disguised as they mostly always are to appear as either American or European: the better the disguise, the more successful the film. This list won't put an end to this entrenched misconception—film critics who write about Canadian cinema know so little to begin with and most can't be bothered to dig deeper—but at least it does demonstrate that Canadian directors and producers can, on occasion, hit the jackpot where it counts most in the real world—at the box office. **Wyndham Wise**

## Industrial Strength Movies

In compiling this list of "Industrial Strength Movies," it was a matter of what to leave off as opposed to what to include. Recently, there have been several commercially successful English-Canadian art-house films—*Exotica*, *Thirty-two Short Films About Glenn Gould*, *Crash*, *The Sweet Hereafter*, *The Red Violin*—which is an encouraging trend; however, these films are "distinctly" Canadian. So all films by Atom Egoyan, David Cronenberg and François Girard have been left off our list, the one exception being Cronenberg's *Scanners*. *Scanners* was the last of his "splatter" films, with no redeeming "Canadian" values. His next film, *Videodrome*, broke through with the critics at home and his unique genius was finally recognized, an acknowledgment that elevated him to the status of cultural hero rather than a director of nasty horror films. Also left off this list are the remarkable string of social comedies from Quebec made during the 1990s, the recipients of five Golden Reel Awards in 10 years: *Ding et Dong: le film*, *La Florida*, *Louis 19: le roi des ondes*, *Les Boys* and *Les Boys II*. *Les Boys* made over \$6 million in Quebec and played on 60 screens, and yet when the film arrived in Toronto, it played on one screen for only two weeks. Conversely, no English-Canadian film could ever hope to make that sort of box office in the rest of Canada alone. Actually, anything distinctively Québécois has been left off, language being the obvious reason. To make it on this list, a film had to have no identifiable or redeeming "Canadian" content—be it language, cultural, thematic or political correctness—and it had to have made a significant impact on the American market, not just in Canada where the movie-going audiences are limited by the relative small size of our population.



### Black Christmas

1974 98m prod August Films, Vision IV Productions exp Findlay J. Quinn p/d Bob Clark sc Roy Moore ph Reginald H. Morris ed Stan Cole m Carl Zittler with Olivia Hussey, Keir Dullea, Margot Kidder, John Saxon, Andrea Martin, Art Hindle.

As the holiday season approaches, a college town is terrorized by a psychopathic killer. One by one the residents of a sorority house are brutally slain by a heavy-breathing maniac armed with plastic wrap and some serious childhood traumas. Director Bob Clark's first Canadian film acts as a somewhat less-than-graphic precursor to the impending slew of "slasher" films in the later 1970s and '80s (*Prom Night*, *Halloween*) offering a preview of such horror conventions as the prowling, subjective camera, the slaughter of sexy, but very dumb, young women and the uncertain death of the killer at the end.

"Moderate suspense thriller." *Halliwell's Film and Video Guide*

Canadian Film Awards: Best Actress (Kidder), Editing, Sound.



## The Changeling

1980 107m prod Tiberius Film Productions exp Mario Kassat, Andrew Vajna p Joel B. Michaels, Garth Drabinsky d Peter Medak sc William Gray, Diana Maddox ph John Coquillon ed Lilla Pedersen, Lou Lombardo m Rick Wilkins with George C. Scott, Trish Van Devere, Melvyn Douglas, Jean Marsh, John Colicos, Barry Morse.

Although it received very mixed reviews, *The Changeling* went on to perform extremely well in the United States and remains one of the highest-grossing Canadian films ever made. Scott plays a music lecturer/composer who moves into a grandiose Seattle mansion to recover from a personal tragedy. Inevitably, the house turns out to be haunted, this time by the avenging spirit of a child whose murder was covered up by a "changeling" (played by Douglas), who grew up to inherit a fortune and is now a powerful industrialist and senator. A middling haunted-house tale—well shot and nicely designed—with a few good moments but only subpar performances by the two veteran leads.

"The film is, without a doubt, the classiest-looking imitation of an American film ever shot in Canada." *Cinema Canada*

"*The Changeling* remains resolutely un-frightening." *Screen International*

Genie Awards: Picture, Adapted Screenplay, Foreign Actor (Scott), Foreign Actress (Van Devere), Art Direction, Sound; Golden Reel Award

## Cube

1998 91m prod Cube Libre, Canadian Film Centre exp Colin Brunton p Mehra Meh, Betty Orr d Vincenzo Natali sc Andre Bijelic, Vincenzo Natali, Graeme Manson ph Derek Rogers ed Jon Sanders m Mark Korven with Maurice Dean Wint, Nicky Guadagni, David Hewlett, Nicole deBoer, Andrew Miller, Julian Richings.

Brilliant set design and smart plotting are compromised by some atrocious acting in this enigmatic sci-fi thriller about six people trapped inside a deadly Rubik's cube. Each "room" looks like another but some contain deadly traps as one unfortunate inmate (Richings) discovers in the opening sequence as he is sliced-and-diced in a spectacular manner. Unfortunately, this is the high point of this clever film which disintegrates into squabbling among the survivors as they try to find their way out. The film's existential musing caused a sensation in Japan and France where it broke all box-office records for a Canadian feature and is the one genuine hit to come from the Feature Film Project of the Canadian Film Centre.

"Having constructed such an impressive shell, the filmmakers seem to have little clue as to what comment they mean to make about society." *Variety*



## The Gate

1987 92m prod Alliance Entertainment p John Kemeny, Andras Hamori d Tibor Takacs sc Michael Nankin ph Thomas Vamos ed Rit Wallis special effects Randall William Cook m Michael Hoening, J. Peter Robinson with Stephen Dorff, Louis Tripp, Christa Denton, Kelly Rowan, Jennifer Irwin.

A storm brings down an ancient tree in the backyard of a Spielbergian suburban family and as soon as the parents leave for a long weekend, demons from Hell are unleashed on the unsuspecting teens (Dorff, Tripp and Denton). A horror flick in the vein of *Poltergeist*, *The Gate* concentrates on the traditional fears of children—strange noises in the night, moving shadows, the death of a family pet, the monster in the closet—and although predictable with its happy ending, there are some truly frightening moments. The pint-size, flesh-eating demons (created by special effects wizard Randall William Cook, who also worked on *Ghostbusters* and *The Thing*) are particularly spooky and unpleasant.

"What it lacks in plot and originality, *The Gate* more than makes up for in scary monsters and good fun." *Variety*

Golden Reel Award



## Heavy Metal

1981 90m prod Heavy Metal Animation Co. exp Leonard Mogel p Ivan Reitman supervising d Gerald Potterton sc Dan Goldberg, Len Blum source *Heavy Metal* comics with original art and stories by Richard Corben, Angus McKie, Dan O'Bannon, Thomas Warkentin and Berni Wrightson ed Janice Brown m Elmer Bernstein, Black Sabbath, Blue Oyster Cult, Cheap Trick, Devo, Donald Fagen, Grand Funk Railroad voices Jackie Burroughs, John Candy, Joe Flaherty, Don Francks, Eugene Levy.

Canada's most successful animated feature is actually six short films animated by hundreds of artists overseen by NFB veteran Gerald Potterton and based on selected stories from the French/American fantasy magazine of the same name. Sexually graphic, very violent, with a mixture of grisly horror and low humour, *Heavy Metal* has the distinction of being the last R-rated animated feature to be released by a major Hollywood studio. Its original box-office performance was not overwhelming but the film remained a staple of midnight screenings throughout the 1980s. As testament to its popularity among connoisseurs of the genre (mostly young men), a digitally remastered version was re-released theatrically in 1996. "Great fun on a mindless, adolescent level." *Leonard Maltin's Movie & Video Guide*

Genie Awards: Overall Sound, Sound Editing; Golden Reel Award

## Johnny Mnemonic

1995 98m prod Alliance Productions exp Staffan Ahrenberg, Victoria Hamburg, Robert Lantos, B.J. Rack p Don Carmody d Robert Longo sc/short story William Gibson ph François Protat ed Ronald Sanders m Brad Fiedel with Keanu Reeves, Dina Meyer, Ice-T, Takeshi, Dolph Lundgren, Henry Rollins.

The pioneer of cyberpunk, William Gibson, wrote the script based on his own short story, and on paper *Johnny Mnemonic* reads like a fun, intellectual adventure story set in *Blade Runner* terrain. However, New York artist Robert Longo's first film is shot in such a flat manner—and Reeves is at his wooden worst—that the result is a terrible bore and probably would have worked better as an animated feature. Reeves plays a 21st-century courier, who can download computer information directly into his brain, on the run from a variety of nasties intent on pulling his plug.

"There's a terrific, wildly inventive science-fiction picture trapped in here somewhere, but the director can't find the images to give us access to it." *The New Yorker*

Golden Reel Award



## Meatballs

1979 94m prod Haliburton Films exp André Link, John Dunning p Dan Goldberg d Ivan Reitman sc Dan Goldberg, Janis Allen, Len Blum, Harold Ramis ph Don Wilder ed Debra Karen m Elmer Bernstein with Bill Murray, Harvey Atkin, Kate Lynch, Chris Makepeace, Russ Banham.

Ivan Reitman's follow-up to the hugely successful *National Lampoon's Animal House* (which he coproduced) is less frantic and more sentimental but definitely in the same mould. Relying on juvenile, bawdy humour and the hip, antiestablishment attitude of *Animal House*, *Meatballs* is set in a summer camp for misfits overseen by head counsellor Murray in his first starring role. His motivational rallying cry to his team of losers as they take on an opposing team from a rich kid's camp is: "It just doesn't matter!" Twenty-two years after its release, *Meatballs* still remains one of the most successful Canadian films of all time and spawned two dreadful sequels.

"Adolescent fun and games for the easily pleased adolescent."  
*Halliwell's Film and Video Guide*

Genie Awards: Screenplay;  
Actress (Lynch);  
Golden Reel Award





## Prom Night

1980 92m prod Simcom exp Deanne Judson p Peter Simpson d Paul Lynch sc William Gray ph Robert New ed Brian Ravok m Paul Zaza, Carl Zittre with Jamie Lee Curtis, Leslie Nielsen, Casey Stevens, Eddie Benton, Antoinette Bower.

Jamie Lee Curtis, fresh from the success of *Halloween*, cemented her early reputation as the "scream queen" with this slasher tale of revenge. Four witnesses to a young girl's accidental death years ago are the target of a stalking killer on the night of the high school prom. While definitely inferior to *Halloween* and *Carrie*, two films that provide the framework for this low-budget knock-off, *Prom Night* survives as a cult favourite in the genre and is the subject of a trivia question in Wes Craven's *Scream*. It also provided a franchise of sorts for producer Peter Simpson as three terrible sequels of diminishing returns were made over the next 12 years.

"Director Paul Lynch keeps things moving at a brisk pace and builds up good chunks of creepy suspense, aided by William Gray's screenplay."  
*The Hollywood Reporter*

## Scanners

1981 103m prod Filmplan International exp Pierre David, Victor Solnicki p Claude Héroux d/sc David Cronenberg ph Mark Irwin ed Ronald Sanders m Howard Shore with Jennifer O'Neill, Stephen Lack, Patrick McGoochan, Lawrence Dane, Michael Ironside, Robert Silverman.



When David Cronenberg made *Scanners*, he was pulling off the tricky balancing act of his early years as a commercial moviemaker, operating as both schlockmeister and auteur of dark, existential fables. *Scanners* is a pleasantly cheesy, derivative sci-fi horror picture with echoes of *A Clockwork Orange*, *Carrie* and Chris Marker's *La Jetée*. The premise sets up a confused, but powerfully telepathic young man (Lack) who's tracking down a fellow "scanner," a megalomaniacal creep (Ironside) who gets off on using his mental prowess to blow up people's heads. Naturally, the movie exhibits Cronenbergian motifs ranging from penetration anxieties to the mutation of human beings into something disturbingly different. The picture spawned several sequels aimed at the teenage horror market.

"Cronenberg is our greatest director and *Scanners* should be the first in a long line of commercial and artistic masterpieces." *Cinema Canada*



## The Silent Partner

1978 105m prod Tiberius Film Production exp Garth Drabinsky p Stephen Young, Joel B. Michaels d Daryl Duke sc Curtis Lee Hanson novel Anders Bodelsen ph Billy Williams ed George Appleby m Oscar Peterson with Elliott Gould, Christopher Plummer, Susannah York, Céline Lomez, John Candy.

A rarity from the tax-shelter era, a film that was both a critical and commercial success. With a script by Curtis Hanson (who would later achieve Hollywood fame and a stack of Oscars for *LA Confidential*), *The Silent Partner* is an unnerving blend of comedy and sudden violence. A bank robber (Plummer) holds up a branch only to discover that a teller (Gould) managed to put aside \$50,000 that the police assume was stolen. Plummer's attempts to recover the cash from Gould provide the suspense, while Gould's attempts to bed a fellow employee (York) provide the subplot. The script is uneven at times, and Gould's character annoyingly fatuous, but Plummer gives one of his best performances as the psychopathic thief, and the brutal murder of his girlfriend (Lomez) remains one of the most violently graphic scenes to be found in any Canadian film.

"Plummer leaves us in no doubt that he is a stop-at-nothing maniac, and director Duke builds up a fever-pitch tension around the ingenious plot."  
*Photoplay*

Canadian Film Awards: Best Feature Film, Director, Editing, Music, Sound Recording

## International Copros

Probably the hardest category to identify as "Canadian," and the one that provokes the strongest reaction from the cultural nationalists who are still outraged that *Porky's* is officially a Canadian film—20 years after it was made. It is a category that could only be created by tax consultants, and, indeed, that's exactly what it is. Majority and minority international coproductions are allowable, under the rules of the Canadian Certification Office in Ottawa, to qualify as "Canadian" for tax purposes. However, despite the negative reaction of the nationalists to the early tax-shelter copros from the 1970s, dismissed as "Can(ed)Euro-pudding," this is not all that bad. Today, some of the best Canadian films are international coproductions; it's what Canadians have come to do very well, especially with European partners. François Girard's *The Red Violin* (which is now the most successful Canadian art-house film of all time) is a multipartner (Canada/U.S./Italy/U.K.) coproduction; Atom Egoyan's *Felicia's Journey* is an official Canada/U.K. coproduction. In choosing this list of "International Copros," again we were looking for films without any redeeming "Canadian" values. *The Red Violin* is left off because of its nominal Canadian setting and its Canadian director. *Black Robe* (an Australia/Canada coproduction), which performed extremely well at the box office, was also left off because of its Canadian setting, even though its director, Bruce Beresford, was Australian. And once again we were looking for films that performed very well in the United States, or in this case European, market and not just in Canada.



### Atlantic City

1980 105m prod International Cinema Corp., Selta Films (France) exp Joseph F. Beaubien, Gabriel Boustani p Denis Héroux, John Kemeny d Louis Malle sc John Guare ph Richard Ciupka ed Suzanne Baron m Michel Legrand with Burt Lancaster, Susan Sarandon, Kate Reid, Michel Piccoli, Hollis McLaren, Robert Joy, Al Waxman.

The most stylish and cinematically satisfying coproduction made to date, this French-American-Canadian hybrid stars Lancaster, in one of the finest performances of his long career, as Lou, an over-the-hill, two-bit hood still on the make. His relationship with Sally (Sarandon), a small-town girl from Moose Jaw, Sask.—who works at an Atlantic City casino clam bar but dreams of becoming a Monte Carlo croupier—leads to an unexpected windfall when her sleazy, dope-dealing ex-husband (Joy) arrives in town with her pregnant sister (McLaren). Lancaster's subtle performance, combined with Guare's almost flawless script and Malle's elegant direction earned *Atlantic City* five Oscar nominations, including Best Picture, the only Canadian dramatic feature to do so. The film made Sarandon a star.

"In *Atlantic City*, Louis Malle is in full control and at his ease, and his collaboration with John Guare produces a rich, original comic tone." Pauline Kael, *The New Yorker*.

Genie Awards: Foreign Actress (Sarandon), Supporting Actress (Reid), Art Direction; Oscar nominations for Picture, Director, Screenplay, Actor (Lancaster), Actress (Sarandon)

## The Care Bears Movie

1985 76m prod Nelvana, Samuel Goldwyn Co. (U.S.) exp Carole MacGillvray, Robert Unkel, Jack Chojnacki, Lou Gioia p Michael Hirsh, Patrick Loubert, Clive Smith d Arna Selznick sc Peter Sauder ph David Altman, Jim Christianson, Barbra Sachs ed John Broughton, Rob Kirkpatrick m Patrica Culler, Carole King, John Sebastian voices Mickey Rooney, Jackie Burroughs, Georgia Engel, Harry Dean Stanton, Sunny Besen Thrasher.



Nelvana's most successful animated feature is no more than a 76-minute commercial for the heavily merchandized characters from the American Greetings Co. and General Mills Toy Group, which have the stated intention of teaching children to express their feelings. The plot has the Bears—each with a symbol on its chest to represent a human emotion—saving the world from an evil spirit intent on removing the last shreds of caring from all children. Definitely aimed at the toddler set with limited adult appeal, the film nevertheless scored big in the United States and on video, virtually saving the floundering Nelvana at a time when its previous features (notably the far more ambitious *Rock & Rule*) died at the box office.

"The purpose of the film is presumably to sell more toys as it unashamedly pushes the message that without at least one Care Bear around life can be very lonely." *Films and Filming*

Golden Reel Award

## Air Bud

1997 97m prod Keystone Entertainment, Walt Disney Pictures (U.S.) exp Michael Strange, Michael Vince, Bob Weinstein, Harvey Weinstein p Robert Vince, William Vince d Charles Martin Smith sc Paul Tamsay, Aaron Mendelsohn ph Mike Southon ed Alison Grace m Brahm Wenger with Michael Jeter, Kevin Zegers, Wendy Makkena, Bill Cobbs, Eric Christmas, Nicola Cavendish.

A modest boy-and-his-dog Disney knockoff, *Air Bud* tells the sentimental and mostly clichéd tale of Buddy, a lovable basketball-scoring stray, and Kevin (Zegers) a lonely, inward boy. Buddy escapes the clutches of a bad-tempered clown (Jeter) and is befriended by the boy who discovers his hoop abilities. Through a series of improbable events, Buddy becomes the star of the local high school basketball team until the misanthropic clown returns to reclaim his dog, leading to a climatic chase. Warm performances, especially by Zegers, Makkena (as the mother) and Cobbs (as an ex-pro coach) enliven an otherwise paint-by-numbers script.

"One can see every plot turn coming like Lawrence's camel on the distant horizon." *Variety*

Golden Reel Award





## Louisiana

1984 128m (TV version 186m) prod International Cinema Corp., Films A2 (France), Filmax (France), RAI TV2 (Italy) p John Kemeny, Denis Héroux d Philippe de Broca sc Etienne Périer, Dominique Fabre, Charles Israel novels Maurice Denuzière ph Michel Brault ed Henri Lanoe m Claude Bolling with Margot Kidder, Ian Charleson, Victor Lanoux, Andréa Ferreol, Len Cariou, Lloyd Bochner.

This sweeping saga of the Old South dates back to the heyday of a production strategy *Cinema Canada* magazine once dubbed "Minee-Feechies." These hybrids functioned both as a TV mini-series and, in an abbreviated form, theatrical features. Directed by Philippe de Broca, the breeziest of 1960s French New Wavers, and shot by Canadian ace cinematographer Michel Brault, *Louisiana* was the most lavish of the hybrids, a kitsch-filled tale about a feisty southern belle (Kidder) whose dilemmas include her family's lost plantation and her tragically emasculated lover (Charleson). It's *Gone with the Wind* meets *The Sun Also Rises* with Kidder doing a subpar Vivien Leigh. The feature film version was cut so frenetically that it plays like the mini-series on speed.

"Big and visually beautiful, but this is by no means a seductive film."  
*Cinema Canada*



## Murder By Decree

1979 124m prod Ambassador Films, Sands Films (U.K.) exp Len Herberman, Robert Goldston p René Dupont, Bob Clark d Bob Clark sc John Hopkins novel Elwyn Jones and John Lloyd ph Reginald H. Morris ed Stan Cole m Carl Zittler, Paul Zaza with Christopher Plummer, James Mason, David Hemmings, Susan Clark, Anthony Quayle, John Gielgud, Frank Finlay, Donald Sutherland, Geneviève Bujold.

*Murder By Decree* features Sherlock Holmes vs. Jack the Ripper in the most elaborate and expensive Canada/ U.K. coproduction ever mounted. It's a splendid, detailed period reconstruction of Victorian London complete with swirling fog and rattling hansom cabs. The story is dense and based on the unfounded notion that the Ripper was a member of the Royal household; however, Plummer is particularly effective (if temperamentally wrong) as Holmes, and Mason gives what is perhaps the best screen performance of Dr. Watson. The film tries very hard to please and features strong supporting performances from Sutherland, Bujold and Clark, but is overly long with an unsatisfactory, pat ending.

"More of a collector's piece than mass entertainment; an exercise in ingenuity."  
*Films and Filming*



## Porky's

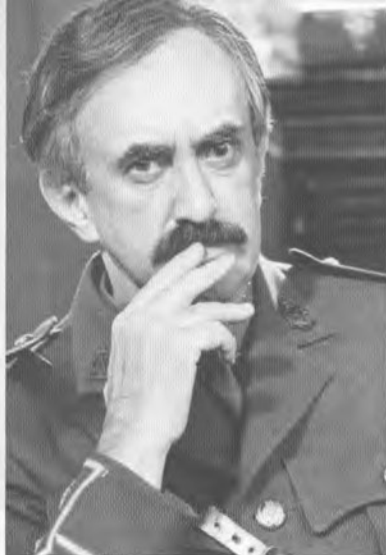
1981 98m prod Astral Bellevue Pathé, Melvin Simon Productions (U.S.) exp Harold Greenberg, Melvin Simon p Don Carmody, Bob Clark d/sc Bob Clark ph Reginald H. Morris ed Stan Cole m Carl Zittler, Paul Zaza with Dan Monahan, Mark Herrier, Wyatt Knight, Roger Wilson, Kaki Hunter, Kim Catrall.

Yet another rehash of *American Graffiti* via *National Lampoon's Animal House*, this raunchy teen comedy about a group of frat boys in 1950s Florida trying to get laid made a ton of money and spawned two sequels. Producer Harold Greenberg built the Astral Communications empire on the profits of *Porky's*, and it has enshrined itself as the most reviled film in the Canadian canon. The reviews were so harsh (*Variety* called it "astonishingly vulgar, and, in a way has to be seen to be believed") and the worldwide box office so huge—exceeding \$60 million; no other Canadian film even comes close—that *Porky's* has been dismissed as a an aberration, a bad joke. Given the recent comic extremes of *Dumb and Dumber* and *American Pie*, the film's juvenile, foul-mouthed humour seems more like a harbinger of things to come.

"Under Clark's direction, and via his scripting, the kids all come off less like good-spirited hellraisers and more like mental defectives."  
*The Hollywood Reporter*

Golden Reel Award





## Regeneration

1998 113m *prod* Rafford Films, Norstar Entertainment, BBC Films (U.K.), The Scottish Arts Council (U.K.) *exp* Saskia Sutton, Mark Shivas *p* Allan Scott, Peter Simpson *d* Gilles MacKinnon *sc* Allan Scott *novel* Pat Barker *ph* Glen MacPherson *ed* Pia Di Ciaula *m* Mychael Danna *with* Jonathan Pryce, James Wilby, Jonny Lee Miller, Stuart Bunce, Tanya Allen.

*Regeneration* is a fictionalized account of a 1917 historical encounter near the end of the First World War between noted psychologist William Rivers (Pryce) and British war poets Siegfried Sassoon (Wilby) and Wilfred Owen (Bunce) in a Scottish mental hospital. Based on Pat Barker's Booker Prize-winning novel, the film is beautifully shot and directed and features an especially fine performance by Pryce as the conflicted doctor who understands that if he succeeds in "curing" his shell-shocked patients they will be sent back to the front to die. An intriguing film about ideas—the nature of courage, art, suffering; the emotional ravages of war and healing—that is, curiously, lacking in dramatic focus.

"Gilles MacKinnon's adaptation of Pat Barker's novel is a beautiful, intense evocation of the complex emotion of the 1914–18 war wrung from its soldiers; the pity, grief, wildness and even the erotic feelings." *Sight and Sound*

## A Special Day

1977 105m *prod* Canafax Films, Compagnia Cinematografica Champion (Italy) *p* Richard Hellman, Carlo Ponti *d* Ettore Scola *sc* Ruggero Maccari, Ettore Scola, Claude Fournier, Maurizio Constanzo *ph* Pasqualino De Santis *ed* Raimondo Crociani *m* Armando Trovajoli *with* Sophia Loren, Marcello Mastroianni, John Vernon, Françoise Berd.

*A Special Day* (*Una Gironata Speciale*) is the simple, affecting story of a fleeting interlude in the lives of two people (Loren, playing against type as a lonely housewife married to a fascist bully, and Mastroianni, a homosexual facing deportation to the camps) who look out on each other across the same courtyard. They are the only two to stay at home when all others turn out for a monster rally held in Rome on May 8, 1938, to celebrate Hitler's historic visit. The two leads play off each other with practised ease, and veteran Italian director Ettore Scola artfully contrasts their brief encounter with the trumpeting of history. A small gem of a movie and an Oscar nominee for Best Foreign-language Film.

"Ettore Scola has etched a classic love story, original and incongruous at the same time." *Variety*



## Sunshine

1999 180m *prod* Alliance Atlantis Pictures, Kinowelt (Germany), ISL Film (Hungary), Dor Film (Hungary) *exp* Rainer Kolmel, Jonathan Debin *p* Robert Lantos, Andras Hamori *d* István Szabó *sc* István Szabó, Israel Horowitz *ph* Lajos Koltai *ed* Dominique Fortin, Michael Arcand *m* Maurice Jarre *with* Ralph Fiennes, Rosemary Harris, Rachel Weisz, Jennifer Ehle, Deborah Kara Ungar, Molly Parker, William Hurt.

*Sunshine* aims at epic status with its chronicle of a Hungarian-Jewish family, the Sonnenschein's, over three generations. Evoking some of the worst traumas of the 20th century during its three-hour running time, the movie portrays victimized European Jews as courageous, but flawed and far from saintly. The focal point of each generational chapter is a male Sonnenschein whose drive to reach the apex of Hungarian society blinds him to the tragic reality that he will always remain an outsider. Fiennes plays the three—a father, son and grandson—with careful attention to detail, and although old-fashioned and faltering at times, *Sunshine* is an engrossing, thematically rich film that often packs an emotional punch.

"*Sunshine's* historical reference-heavy narrative walks a fine line between novelistic tragedy and comically overstated melodrama, falling down on the job more than once." *eye weekly*

Genie Awards: Picture, Sound Editing, Overall Sound

## Quest For Fire

1982 110m *prod* International Cinema Corp., Belstar Production (France), Stephan Films (France) *exp* Michael Gruskoff *p* Denis Héroux, John Kemeny *d* Jean-Jacques Annaud *sc* Gérard Brach *novel* J.-H. Rosny Sr. *language* Anthony Burgess *adviser* Desmond Morris *ph* Claude Agostini *ed* Yves Langlois *m* Philippe Sarde *with* Rae Dawn Chong, Everett McGill, Ron Pearlman, Nameer El-Kadi.

At any level, it's difficult to take *Quest For Fire* too seriously and it compares poorly to Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, another film dealing with similar themes of primitive growth leading to spiritual understanding. It succeeds moderately well, however, by being at times, funny, tense and touching as three hapless early humans (McGill, Pearlman and El-Kadi) travel across a prehistoric landscape (shot in Kenya, Scotland, Iceland and Northern Ontario) in search of life-preserving fire. Their language was created by Anthony Burgess and body movements by Desmond Morris, author of *The Naked Ape*. Rae Dawn Chong stands out as a nymphet from a rival tribe who teaches the trio how to make fire—and love.

"Annaud's *Quest For Fire* is an engaging prehistoric yarn that happily refuses to bludgeon the viewer with facile or gratuitous effects." *Variety*

Genie Awards: Actress (Chong), Editing, Sound, Sound Editing; Oscar for Best Make-up