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have a film that says less about racism than it does about Hollywood's penchant for using stereotypes as an easy way around the tough business of characterization. But there is even more horrible stuff in the movie.

There is, for instance, the murderer, who must also be pressed into the "crazy" mold to justify a basically unbelievable murder. And there is the aforementioned Colonel Nivens, who specializes in soap-opera confrontations with Davenport throughout the film and then suddenly switches to being a real pussycat during the optimistic closing scene. And...

But let's leave the gory details to film pathologists, and turn to a film as deep and moving as *A Soldier's Story* is shallow and hackneyed.

The film is *Streamers*, directed by that out-cast from Hollywood, Robert Altman. Like *A Soldier's Story*, it has an army setting, an

undercurrent of racial tensions (infinitely more subtle and realistic than in the latter film), and some gory murder. But the similarities end there.

The most significant difference is the attention to character in *Streamers*. The six soldiers waiting to be shipped to Vietnam in the mid-sixties are above all recognizably human, with familiar virtues and familiar faults.

There are the two career sergeants: drunkenly gregarious, pissing-in-the-corner vulgar, yet oddly moving when they tell the young recruits in grim/funny terms about the hazards of parachuting. It is from their long soliloquy that the "streamer" metaphor comes. The story of the soldier with the tangled parachute ("streamer") who goes into the ground "like a knife" is as vivid a death metaphor as one is likely to hear.

Then there are the recruits: Billy, as bland, naive and middle-class as an Education student; Roger, the cautious, reticent black

who just tries to get along; Rich, the bright, touchy gay whom the others recoil from; and Carlyle — loud, high-strung, black, and fed up with KP duty, the military and the world.

The violence in the movie — as gut-wrenching as the violence of *A Soldier's Story* is sanitized — grows naturally and inexorably from their varied personalities, from the "very small, subtle fabric of misunderstandings and betrayals" that occurs between them (to quote the screenwriter). There are no melodramatic personality clashes or clunky psychological theories to help events along.

The violence simply happens because of the same everyday frictions that cause international sabre-rattling and our local Students' Union confrontations.

The usual argument I hear against this sort of film is that psychological realism is boring, which is pretty strange, coming as it usually does from people who derive endless

pleasure from predictable Hollywood fantasy. At any rate, there is too much action in *Streamers* for this label to stick.

Another argument is that such tragedy is depressing, which is a psychological reversal of the true state of affairs. In reality it is the naturally cheerful person who can handle a frank portrayal of the world's harshness and cruelty, and the unhappy person who seeks refuge in pleasant Hollywood illusions like *A Soldier's Story*. Seeing *Streamers*, therefore is a stimulating affirmation that one can take the worst life can dish out.

Some people apparently couldn't because one night when it played at the Princess Theatre several movie-goers walked out in the middle of it.

For the tough-minded, however, this is one film which, like *Danton*, should be demanded when dropping a suggestion into the Princess suggestion box. In the current desert of film we need all the oases we can get.

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