

ARTS

These two cuties are for the birds

by J.A. Stephan

Bird On A Wire
directed by John Badham
released by Universal Pictures

It is easy to make *Bird On A Wire* a target for criticism. Two of Hollywood's cutest try in vain to instill life into a pathetically ordinary script.

Mel Gibson, touted as the handsomest man alive by some, plays Rick. Goldie Hawn, both perky and endearing, plays Marianne. Once lovers in their youth, Rick and Marianne rediscover each other after a fifteen year separation. Rick is presently in the midst of fighting off two bad guys, Sorenson and Diggs, who are after his hide for the testimony he gave that put one of them in jail for drug smuggling. Marianne is still mad because Rick disappeared into the witness relocation program when wedding bells were sounding.

When Sorenson and Diggs catch up to Rick in a Detroit gas station, Marianne is coincidentally on hand to spirit Rick off to safety. Although the ex-lovers escape the first onslaught, Rick is framed for the murder of a mechanic shot during the attack. Now a marked man by both the police and the underworld, Rick convinces Marianne to transport him to an old friend in Wisconsin.

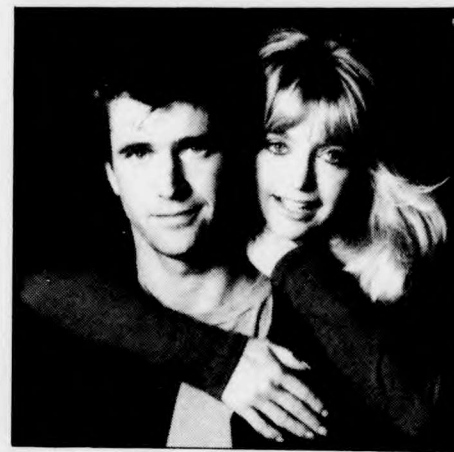
So begins an all too predictable cat and mouse game. During their journey, the couple visit some of

Rick's old employers; before long, gun-wielding antagonists track them down. From a ferry, to a motorcycle, to a biplane: Rick and Marianne move on doggedly towards a climatic confrontation.

While being pursued, the pair hash over old grievances and engage in new arguments; still, they end up in bed together. A lacklustre effort, but one which brings them closer together for the finale.

The good guys and the bad eventually meet head-on within a zoo. His back against the wall, Rick chooses to stand and fight. Lacking firepower, the lone wolf engages the lions, tigers, and monkeys. Mayhem breaks out and the animals become more of a threat than anticipated. Does the clever pair prevail? It's only a matter of time before that well-worn schmaltzy ending precedes the credits.

Director John Badham calls *Bird On A Wire* an action-romantic comedy. The action is evident in car chases, explosions, and aerial sequences; the romance never manages to pluck one's heart strings. Bickering constantly, Rick and Marianne's renewed relationship tends to rely on memories of better times together. Not that the screenplay doesn't allow for a case of the mutual hots. Gratuitous flesh peddling abounds with bared chests and bums. Rumour has it Gibson's fanny really belongs to a stand-in.



MEL AND GOLDIE: *Bird on a Wire* is a chase movie that goes nowhere.

The situational comedy is a bad joke and the good one-liners are scarce. Imagine using a gaggle of effusive sissies at a hairdresser's shop for a laugh. Even more tired is expecting Gibson to pull off the

same gay gag Eddie Murphy perfected in *Beverly Hills Cop*. Hawn fares no better as she is made to combat a cockroach while showering. Whereas Gibson is destined to continue with better roles,

Hawn is suffering a string of box office losers.

Better to leave *Bird On A Wire* alone and go hunting among the barrage of summer movies soon to be released.

Rain: unjust war, uneasy peace

by Ira Nayman

Black Rain
directed by Shohei Imamura
released by Festival Films for the Angelika Films Studio

"Unjust peace is better than just war."

A badly burned woman forlornly holds the charcoal black, barely discernible body of a child to her breast. A young boy whose flesh seems to

have melted off his body begs to be recognized by his brother. Forms barely recognizable as human writhe in agony. Body parts flow down a stream.

The first five minutes of Shohei Imamura's new film, *Black Rain*, are horrific, as close as film can get to portraying Hell on Earth. Fortunately, the rest of the film is far less intense; otherwise, *Black Rain* would be totally unwatchable.

The Japanese film starts with the American bombing of Hiroshima, although most of it actually takes place five years later. The survivors of the bombing have tried to go back to their normal lives, but find themselves psychologically, socially and physically devastated by the event.

The story centres around Yasuko (Yoshiko Tanaka), who is having trouble finding suitors because she was caught in the immediate fallout of the blast (the black rain of the title), and everybody doubts her health. Much of the film is taken up with the efforts of her aunt and uncle (Kazuo Kitamura and Etsuko Ichihara) to find her a husband before they succumb to radiation sickness.

Black Rain is a sombre film. The pace is extremely slow, extremely deliberate; while this makes the slow deterioration of the

villagers more poignant, it makes the film all the more difficult to watch.

(Why is it possible for mainstream directors in a country like Japan to turn out thoughtful, humane dramas when North Americans can't? It can't be the influence of television, with its accelerated editing and frequent "jolts;" Japan produces some of the most frenetic TV shows in the world. Part of the reason may be that Japan is old enough to have developed alternative styles of storytelling, whereas North American film doesn't have other traditions on which to fall back.)

The black and white cinematography was breathtaking; Imamura's long shots of homes set in the Japanese countryside were reminiscent of ancient oriental paintings.

The performances were, for the most part, restrained. While this suited the style of the film, it seemed unlikely given the tragedy of what was happening. (The one exception, Keisuke Ishida playing a war veteran who had a compulsion for throwing himself in front of vehicles, made a wonderful contrast.)

Black Rain is a long (121 minutes), understated cry against the horrors of nuclear war. It is currently playing in only three cities in North America (the others are Los Angeles and New York). See it.

New Australian film dominated by dark forces

by Jim Russell

Celia
written and directed by Ann Turner
produced by Seon Films

Celia is a movie dominated by supernatural creatures, abusive men and cruel children. Together, these dark forces encircle nine year-old Celia and plunge her story of innocence into a nightmarish world of intolerance, adultery and death.

Set in Melbourne, Australia in 1957, the charming star of this Aussie movie is a twelve year-old veteran actress named Rebecca Smart (Celia). She gives the movie its substance and energy; the storybook creatures, called Hobyahs, give it a unifying tension.

The Hobyahs, according to English fable, are forest creatures fond of abducting little old ladies and carrying them off, presumably to their death. Celia is both drawn and repulsed by these imaginary monsters, whose grotesque forms begin to menace Celia soon after she finds her beloved Granny dead in her bed.

Granny's death, however, comes to mean much more to Celia than just the death of a loved one; it marks the beginning of her loss of innocence. Soon after Granny's funeral, Celia is besieged by a particularly cruel and hostile world, of which the Hobyahs are a part.

Filmed in the summer of 1988, *Celia* was shot over the brief period of nine weeks, which must have been a grueling experience for the twelve year old Smart, who appears in almost every scene. Called upon to handle a wide range of emotional responses, she does an excellent job.

Nicholas Eadie, in the role of Celia's mercurial father, plays a narrow minded, manipulative adulterer who only occasionally exhibits any love for his daughter. It is a tough role to play, and to his credit, Eadie manages to evoke some degree of sympathy for his character.

Pat, Celia's mother (Maryanne Fahey), though weak and unsupportive at the beginning of the film, undergoes a believable and welcome transition, emerging towards the end as a strong individual capable of initiating rather than simply reacting to events. When Celia unwittingly commits murder, it is Mommy who destroys the evidence and shelters Celia from harm.

Celia is blessed with good acting and a workable premise; why, then, has it been condemned to a lonely existence on the "artsy" circuit? Part of the answer lies in the film's low budget and lack of "name" stars; but, a significant portion of the blame must be laid at the feet of the writer, the cinematographer and the soundtrack.

The main problem lies in Ann Turner's script, which won the 1984 Australian Writers Guild Award for Best Unproduced Screenplay. It touches on too many themes, becoming more a casual excursion than a purposeful journey.

Innocence, censorship, death, adultery, political intolerance, communism, government bureaucracy and childhood cruelty are all crammed into 103 minutes of motion picture. Perhaps Turner, who both wrote the script and directed the film, was too close to the material, or perhaps the material, much of which was drawn from her own childhood was just too close to Turner.

Whatever the reason *Celia* has a meandering story that wanders right off the end of the film, leaving the viewer with the feeling that the last reel was lost in transit somewhere over the Pacific Ocean.

The second culprit is Director of Photography Geoffrey Simpson. His weapon of choice is grain, and lots of it. As a result, much of the movie takes on a harshness that is inappropriate for filming children.

Culprit number three was the soundtrack, which tended to be harsh and muddled. This will be particularly frustrating to any one like myself who is not attuned to Australian accents.

Overall though, I liked *Celia*, which is why I would rate it a five out of 10.



Yasuko (Yoshiko Tanaka, centre) and her aunt (Kazuo Kitamura) and uncle (Etsuko Ichihara) face the horrors of the nuclear blast on Hiroshima in Shohei Imamura's *Black Rain*.