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MOVIE REVIEW

'Navigator' Travels From Medieval to Modern

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Vincent Ward's "The Navigator" (Westside Pavilion) transports us to as remote a time and place imaginable, a snow-covered copper-mining village in Cumbria, in March of 1348. The rapidly advancing Black Plague has not yet arrived along the Scottish border, and the villagers, trusting in the psychic dreams of a 9-year-old youth, Griffin (Hamish McFarlane), believe that if the miners make a pilgrimage to a distant city, erecting a cross of copper on its spire, God may spare the village from the epidemic.

With "The Navigator," Ward, the gifted young New Zealand film maker, has fashioned a beguiling fable, surprising and original, the kind of film that is fully realized visually. We associate the medieval with harshness, and while Ward's imagery contains much that is starkly dramatic, "The Navigator" is a film of great warmth and camaraderie. Ward's pilgrims are hearty, good-natured fellows, devout without being fanatic and genuinely caring of each other's welfare. The film exudes a sense of community, rooted in a closeness to nature as well as God, that's enough to make you grow wistful

in envy.

Even though Griffin's visions instruct the men to burrow their way to the other side of the earth, using only the most primitive of machinery, you may be as surprised as they are when they surface in an unnamed modern city (actually a composite of Auckland and Wellington). Ward misses no opportunity to show us the pilgrims awed and terrified by having traveled so abruptly into the present. Ward, however, has more in mind than a simple time-travel fantasy, although he does not overlook its potential for humor or wonderment; "The Navigator" is finally a fable of faith and sacrifice.

The film is energized by a remorseless sense of forging ahead, a determination on the part of both the film maker and his people to see a task through—and in doing so—to arrive at the truth of a matter, consciously or otherwise. Like Werner Herzog, Ward is drawn to people who reach out for the outer limits of human experience.

Geoffrey Simpson's alternating high contrast black-and-white and muted color sequences are a key asset. Davood A. Tabrizi's score is at once fresh and timeless, a good summary for "The Navigator" (Times-rated Mature, appropriate for older children) itself.

