

CANNES COMPETING

The Navigator (NEW ZEALAND-COLOR/B&W)

An Arenaflm and Film Investment Corp. of New Zealand presentation. Produced by John Maynard. Directed by Vincent Ward. Screenplay, Ward, Kelly Lyons, Geoff Chappe; camera (color, b&w), Geoffrey Simpson; editor, John Scott; music, Davood A. Tabrizi; production design, Sally Campbell; sound (Dolby), Dick Reade; coproducer, Gary Hannam. Reviewed at National Film Unit theater, Wellington, N.Z., March 19, 1988. (In Cannes Film Festival, competing). Running time: 93 MIN.

Connor	Bruce Lyons
Arno	Chris Haywood
Griffin	Hamish McFarlane
Searle	Marshall Napier
Ulf	Noel Appleby
Martin	Paul Livingston
Linnet	Sarah Peirse

Wellington — "The Navigator" is a remarkable second feature from director Vincent Ward, whose first full-length film, "Vigil," was selected for main competition at Cannes in 1984. It is remarkable because of its absorbing story that links medieval fears and fortunes to our times, while confirming Ward as an original talent.

The story begins in Cumbria in 1348, the year of the Black Death. A mining village lives in fear of the advancing plague. Young Griffin (Hamish McFarlane) is anxious for the return of his beloved, much-older brother Connor (Bruce Lyons) from the outside world. He is haunted by a dream about a journey, a quest to a great cathedral in a celestial city, and a figure about to fall from a steeple.

When his brother returns to the village with tales of impending doom, 9-year-old Griffin recounts his dream which reveals a way whereby the community might escape.

The two brothers, with four comrades, set out on the journey fired by Griffin's prophetic vision. It takes them to a city of the late 1800s and on a mission against time if their village is to be saved. There is

no triumph without sacrifice — in the dream and in reality.

The formidable skills of Ward are shown in the way his story works, not only as adventure, but as the love story of two brothers and a parable of faith and religion.

As the medievals joust with the paraphernalia of a night-bound, modern city, in their striving to reach the cathedral at its heart, Ward conjures a series of striking sequences and images.

The best affirm, invariably with humor, the timeless ascendancy of individual human spirit against the forces that would dehumanize, whether it is Griffin momentarily mesmerized by a wall of tv screens beaming their message or Connor hurtling through the night clinging to the front of a "monster" train.

From the convincing detail of the 14th century locations to the uneasy, slumbering, contemporary metropolis, Ward's inspiration is apparent, and actors and technicians give their best.

Geoffrey Simpson's photography — stark black and white for the Cumbrian sequences, color for the enactment of Griffin's dream and visions — is of the highest order, with score by Iranian composer Davood Tabrizi (domiciled in Sydney) empathetic with the whole.

Fine performances are delivered by McFarlane and Lyons, and also Marshall Napier and Paul Livingston as the Cumbrians Searle and Martin.

"The Navigator" should find broader acceptance and do greater business on and off the festival and art-house tracks, than the director's earlier "Vigil." As the first coproduction between the New Zealand and Australian film commissions, following producer John Maynard's difficulty in raising all the necessary finance in Ward's homeland, it sets a sterling precedent for future joint enterprises in feature filmmaking between the two countries. —Nic.