

The Sun-Herald

DECEMBER 11, 1988

THE NAVIGATOR

(PG). Directed by Vincent Ward. Starring Hamish McFarlane, Bruce Lyons, Chris Hawwood, Academy Twin, Pitt Centre.

★ ★ ★



Navigator dazzles the senses

So what do you think of a NZ/Aussie co-production about a group of 14th century miners who tunnel through the earth to reach a 20th century city? Reeling — with instant mohawk hairstyle — in shock?

With a storyline like this, *The Navigator* could have been doomed to poky late night screenings in Artsville, France.

Instead, we have a complex dazzling film, ambitiously conceived and confidently executed. A film which takes on a cumbersome outrageous storyline and produces engrossing entertainment filled with fine performances, outstanding cinematography, pathos, perception and, yes, even humour.

Simply on the basis of stylish entertainment which overcomes budget and story disadvantages, *The Navigator* is well deserving of its recent six Australian Film Institute Awards — including Best Film.

With his imaginative story

about a young boy, his brother and friends who try to tunnel away from the Cumbrian Marshes and the steadily advancing threat of the Black Death, New Zealand director Vincent Ward has created a timeless, beautiful looking film which breaks conventions and adds yet another facet to the New Zealand — and Australian — film industry.

There are flaws — a jumpy change from black and white into colour, moments of confusion, an ending which sails close to the clichéd (although it still produces one final twist).

However, even the jumpest flashback/forward sequence works to *The Navigator's* advantage where a patient audience is concerned. All is explained in this film. The characters consistently hold the interest and the seemingly uneven pace gives *The Navigator* a restless energy which is often lacking in its more conventional Australian cousins.

The keynote to a striking film is a finely tuned cast with not one face out of place. For audiences resigned to flat-voiced, flat-footed

Aussie support characters, *The Navigator* is a constant delight.

From young star Hamish McFarlane's mesmerising performance as the boy who convinces village leaders to try a different escape, through to charismatic Bruce Lyons as his older brother and wonderful Australian/New Zealand actors like Chris Haywood, Paul Livingston and Noel Appleby in support roles, *The Navigator* never puts a casting foot wrong.

Ready for more delights? A rich, resonant soundtrack based on medieval Celtic music adds to the authentic "feel" of the film. Last, but definitely not least there is the moody camerawork from Geoff Simpson. The visual images in this film are outstanding by any country's standards. If frozen, almost every frame here could make the most perfect photograph. That alone makes *The Navigator* a delight not only for film buffs but also for any adult looking for innovative, high quality home grown entertainment.

■ ROB LOWING