

C I N E M A



Courtesy Photo

Tom Drake (Christopher Penn) makes a peace offering to his angry girlfriend, Eileen Phillips (Jenny Wright) in "The Wild Life."

Film traces teens' wild summer



One of the few '80s film trends that we can be proud of is the development and treatment of teenagers as real characters. Taps can be considered the nominal forerunner, with such features as *The Outsiders*, *Fast Times At Ridgemont High* and, in particular, *Sixteen Candles* carrying on the trend.

The Wild Life attempts to continue in this direction, following the lives of four high schoolers and one recent graduate during the last week of summer vacation.

The characters are varied and all fairly interesting. Tom Drake (Christopher Penn) is the most interesting, a party animal who convinces his co-worker, graduate Bill Conrad (Eric Stoltz), to take him on as a roommate. Tom's would-be girlfriend Eileen (Jenny Wright) is a fashion-conscious young woman looking for something more mature than what the irresponsible Tom can offer.

Anita (Lea Thompson), Eileen's best friend and Bill's ex-girlfriend, is currently enjoying her first relationship with an older man. The last prominent character, Bill's younger brother Jim (Ilan Mitchell-Smith) is a 15-year-old "Vietnam nut," walking around in surplus fatigues and immersed in the music of the '60s.

These characters interact together for the last week of summer vacation and explore

the outer limits of autonomy, love, sex, and of course, partying. And, as cliched as it sounds, the characters all do a little growing and learning during this period.

Written by *Fast Times* author Cameron Crowe and produced and directed by *Fast Times* producer Art Linson, *The Wild Life* makes obvious attempts to repeat the success of its inspiration.

Most of the elements are here: a varied cast of characters, all portrayed by up and coming young performers; a loose community of students whose lives touch, often only marginally, each others'; hip dialogue and a popular soundtrack; and, of course, fairly well-developed characters.

Unfortunately this film doesn't come together as well as its predecessor. The characters aren't as fully developed as they could be, although the cast is marvelous and energetic; the humor isn't as natural.

For example, one of the film's biggest gags involves three drunk wrestlers breaking through the wall of an apartment, much to the dismay of the neighbors. Humor based on the destruction and abuse of other people's property gets less funny with every movie.

There are some nice touches, though. Jim is a fascinating character and his hero worship of Charlie, a burned-out vet played by Randy Quaid, is handled very forcefully. Both Penn and Wright give solid characterizations, as does

Mitchell-Smith, and the easy going tone of the film highlights these characters over the story. Finally there are some very effective, and very funny, small gags scattered about the film.

The Wild Life isn't going to break box-office records or win any Academy awards, but a lot can be said for its treatment of teenagers as individuals. While not the tightest film of its genre, it can be considered a qualified success.

ALSO PLAYING: The campus flick to see this weekend is the outstanding *MASH*, an underrated look at the insanity of war, and the insanity a cadre of doctors indulge in to survive. I find Robert Altman's brilliant film superior to the safer television series it inspired because of the issues it tackles, most importantly the need for controlled lunacy to protect one's own sanity. Although I personally dislike the price hike Catalyst has introduced (which none of the other film organizations found necessary), it's worth it to see this fabulous film, a must for those who have yet to experience it. Plays Friday in 180 PLC.

Other recommendations are Werner Herzog's acclaimed *Every Man For Himself* and *God Against All*, playing Saturday in 150 Geology, and the Bijou's late night feature *Altered States*, showing tonight and tomorrow night. Check today's classifieds for complete listings and showtimes.

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