



Entertainment

The Leader-Post Regina Thurs., Nov. 19, 1987

Section F

Saskatchewan as a nuclear wasteland

By Patrick Davitt
of The Leader-Post

Wheat Soup is the most unusual, funny movie you'll probably never see.

Regina film-makers Gerald Saul and Brian Stockton wrote, edited, directed and baby-sat Wheat Soup through the almost three years it took to make.

For their efforts, the two walked away from last week's Saskatchewan Film and Video Awards with an armful of plaudits, including best overall production, for their 75-minute surrealistic comedy.

The judges loved it. The general public, barring some as-yet-unforeseen miracle, won't get to see it. Wheat Soup is set in the Saskatchewan of many years hence, after the Great Flattening, a nuclear war.

Regina film-makers win with surrealistic comedy

open to question, of course. But that's how Saul and Stockton decided to tell their story.

"We like how Kurt Vonnegut uses science-fiction settings to do odd things in his stories without having to explain them," Stockton says.

Saul nods.

Their message seems to be to encourage viewers to consider the cultural remnants that will be the basis of any attempt at civilization that succeeds this one.

"What happens if our culture is destroyed?" Stockton asks.

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to illustrate the futility of wanting to be in the boss' shoes.

The parable is a storyline from a Flinstones show.

"I believe that you can explain any aspect or philosophy of life by referring to an episode of The Flinstones," Stockton says.

"The anvil is one of our favorite things, too," Saul says.

Indeed. The anvil, a cartoon standby, turns up repeatedly in the film, being dropped on heads, dragged across the ground or clanking on the soundtrack.

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"We set out to use the landscape," Saul says.

"We've done a lot of road trips in Saskatchewan and looked at the landscape," Stockton continues the thought, as he does frequently during a conversation at the Saskatchewan Film Pool.

Not interrupting, mind you; just picking up where Saul leaves off. They both do it.

"We wanted to take advantage of where we are," Saul says, "but we're not farmers."

"We barely knew what wheat looked like," Stockton says.

"So we tried to imagine how someone from outside might see the land," Saul concludes.

Whether an outsider would see the prairie as a nuclear wasteland is

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If *Wheat Soup* has the answers, the culture of tomorrow will be a mix of senseless materialism and cartoon images.

The protagonist of the story is Sam, the last wheat farmer, who questions the sense of trading wheat for appliances — which are then buried in the ground.

So he decides to head out from the farm to see what else there is.

Along the way he meets Ralph, whom he shoots regularly because Ralph is a wheat poacher.

If you grew up watching the *Bugs Bunny* show you remember Sam and Ralph, the sheepdog and the wolf in the classic cartoon.

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Indeed. The anvil, a cartoon standby, turns up repeatedly in the film, being dropped on heads, dragged across the ground or clanking on the soundtrack.

It isn't lightweight, though. The cartoon images are like comic roundhouse punches, but there are deft sharp jabs as well.

A couple of sequences poke briskly at religion.

In a funeral scene, the *Farmer's Almanac* becomes something of a Bible, a Holy Book of uncertain ancestry that is nonetheless referred to for spiritual guidance.

In another, Sam is told, "It's not like we looked down and said, 'Let there be wheat.'"

It's quite a good movie, even though it is very sparse and the pace is often extremely slow.

"We wanted to convey that sense of sparseness," Stockton explains.

"You can't pace anything quickly on the prairies," Saul explains.

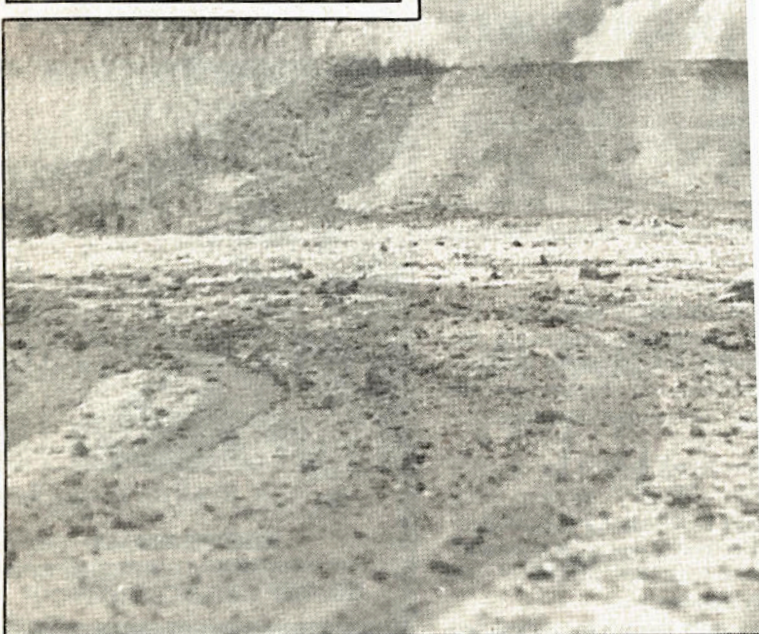
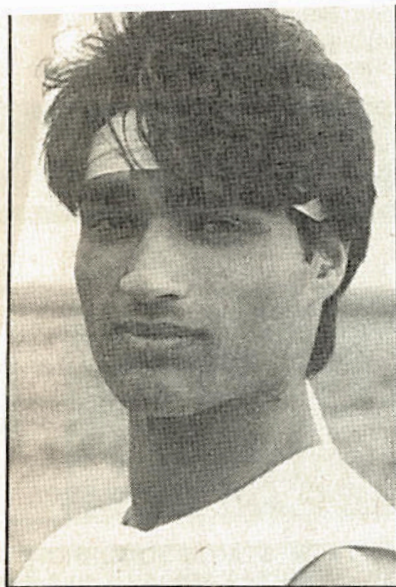
The *Wheat Soup* concept was first formed in summer of 1984. Shooting began in August of 1985 and continued for 13 months.

After that came editing, done in March of this year.

Toward the end of production the editing suite was going 24 hours a day as the two men took turns putting in 12-hour shifts.

"Living on coffee and doughnuts — that was hard," Saul says.

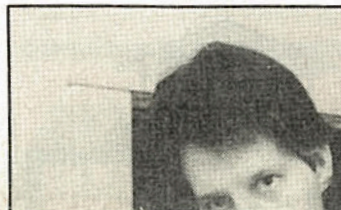
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Wheat Soup, starring Shaf Hussain as Sam (in

"There's really a good crowd coming through the U of R Film Department," Saul says.

And the Film Pool is gathering new momentum, with new people coming in to take advantage of the chance to talk about movie making,



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"And dealing with the equipment .
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"The equipment was always
breaking down," Saul finishes.

With all of that, both say the hard-
est part of the whole project was or-
ganizing the people.

"It's difficult to find people who'll
be there and available," Stockton
says.

All the same, the crew — assem-
bled from the ranks of the Saskat-
chewan Film Pool and from friends
in the University of Regina film pro-
gram — did yeoman work.

Marc LaFoy won a Saskatchewan
Film and Video Award for his work
on the sound, and photographer Spy-
ro Egarhos one for cinematography.

Saul also won an unrelated award
for an animated film called I Can't
Go Home, while Stockton's All
Form, No Substance won honors as
best experimental film.

Saul and Stockton are both confi-
dent that their success with Wheat
Soup is an indication of the strength
of Regina's largely unknown film
community.

"I think the industry is really on
its way now," Stockton says.



Wheat Soup, starring Shaf Hussain as Sam (inset), is set after nuclear v

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to make movies.

The National Film Board got its
share of the credit as well for pro-
viding services like processing film
and so on at reasonable rates.

Now the problem is to get the film
out to where people can see it.

It has played once in public, at the
Museum of Natural History Nov. 15.

"We're still waiting for a really
good video copy for wider distribu-
tion," Saul says.

"A good videotape would make it
relatively inexpensive to reach po-
tential buyers," Stockton adds.

Those buyers could include cable-
and pay-television operators. A few
sales in those areas could make it
possible to make more prints of the
16-millimetre film — which costs
\$700 a copy.

In the meantime, Wheat Soup will
be entered into as many festivals
and competitions as possible.

If you're watchful, you might
even get to see it.



Photo by P.

Regina film-makers Gerald Saul (left) and Brian Stoc