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AMBUSH

(WAR DRAMA — FINNISH)

A Matila & Rohr Prods. production. (International sales: Nordisk Film Intl., Copenhagen.) Produced by Marko Rohr, Ilkka Matila.

Directed by Olli Saarela. Screenplay, Saarela, Antti Tuuri, based on the novel by Tuuri. Camera (color, widescreen), Kjell Lagerroos; editor, Jukka Nykanen; music, Tuomas Kantelinen; production designer, Pertti Hilkaamo. Reviewed at Gothenburg Film Festival, Feb. 2, 1999. Original title: *Rukajärven tie*. Running time: 100 MIN.

With: Peter Franzen, Irina Bjorklund, Kari Heiskanen, Taisto Reimaluoto, Kari Vaananen, Tommi Eronen, Pekka Heikkiniemi, Pekka Huotari, Tero Jartti, Rauno Juonen, Arttu Kapulainen, Matti Laitinen, Kristo Salminen, Kari-Pekka Toivonen.

This handsome Finnish production has more in common with "The Thin Red Line" than with "Saving Private Ryan." Ambitious mix of visual poetry (thanks to excellent lensing by the always reliable Kjell Lagerroos) and brutal battle scenes creates an often moving film about how war hardens and destroys the human soul. Offshore programmers should take a look.

Pic centers on a small Finnish unit that is sent behind enemy lines during the war against Russia in 1942. The leader, Perkola (Peter Franzen), is a man with a conscience, but his experiences gradually lead him to take part in the kind of atrocities he previously tried to prevent. He has also been led to believe that his fiancée, Kaarina (Irina Bjorklund), who's a nurse, has been killed by Russian partisans, thus increasing his anger and despair. With settings that are reminiscent of Elem Klimov's (albeit superior) "Go and See," "Ambush" is a thoughtful and mostly very watchable pic, with its emphasis on how war dehumanizes the individual soldier.

—Gunnar Rehlin

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