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AUGUST 32ND ON EARTH

(UN 32 AOUT SUR TERRE)

(DRAMA — CANADIAN)

A Max Films production. (International sales: Alliance Independent Films, Toronto.) Produced by Roger Frappier.

Directed, written by Denis Villeneuve. Camera (color), Andre Turpin; editor, Sophie Leblond; music, Pierre Desrochers, Nathalie Boileau, Robert Charlebois, Jean Leloup; art director, Jean Babin; costumes, Suzanne Harel; sound, Martin Pinsonnault; assistant director, Mireille Goulet; casting, Lucie Robitaille. **Reviewed at Cannes Film Festival (Un Certain Regard)**, May 21, 1998. Running time: 88 MIN.

Simone Pascale Bussieres
Philippe Alexis Martin
Taxi Driver Richard S. Hamilton

With: Serge Theriault, Emmanuel Bilodeau, Paule Baillargeon, Frederic Desager, Evelyne Rompre, Ivan Smith, Estelle Esse, Joanne Cote, R. Craig Costin, Marc Jeanty, Venelina Ghiaurov, Lee C. Fobert.

By BRENDAN KELLY

Former rock-video helmer Denis Villeneuve's feature bow, "August 32nd on Earth," is an appealing though ultimately slight drama about a young woman thrown into an emotional tizzy after surviving a bad car crash. In what is essentially a two-hander, lead thespas Pascale Bussieres and Alexis Martin lend intriguing charm to their characters, but the thin story simply doesn't have the goods to keep audiences interested over the long haul. The most striking thing

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about "August 32nd on Earth" is the visual style, and there's no question Villeneuve has real talent in that department. But the scripting is a lot less assured. Commercial prospects aren't especially bright.

Opening has Simone (Bussieres) falling asleep at the wheel on the highway and careening off the road. While she doesn't suffer any serious long-term physical damage, there are some psychic scars. Simone immediately quits her modeling/acting job, nixes a planned trip to Italy and desperately phones her best friend, Philippe (Martin), to call in a rather unusual favor.

She suggests they have a baby together, and Philippe, who already has a girlfriend, is, to put it mildly, a little freaked out by the concept. But Simone clearly has sway over Philippe, and he reluctantly agrees to the request, on one condition: They have to do the procreating in the middle of a desert.

Simone decides that the area outside Salt Lake City is the nearest desert to Montreal, and they're soon on a flight to Utah. They hire a cabby to ferry them out to the middle of nowhere, where both of them decide the strange, salty landscape is not quite the aphrodisiac they expected.

The best sequences are built around the quietly comic interaction between the determined Simone and the wishy-washy, impressionable Philippe. The sly humor in the early going is quite original, but the at-

tempt at moving to a more serious level in the second half is much less deftly handled. A couple of key plot developments — the discovery of a burned cadaver, a latenight street brawl — come out of nowhere and seem to be arbitrarily shoe-horned into the pic.

One problem is the absence of fully realized characters aside from Simone and Philippe. Philippe's soul-searching, for example, would carry more weight if his g.f., Juliette (Evelyne Rompre), were in the picture for more than two seconds.

Martin is very good as Philippe, and his witty, angst-filled personality gives the film much of its color. Bussieres also delivers a strong perf., and, as always, there is something both captivating and mysterious about her onscreen presence; Simone's lack of emotional depth seems more the fault of the scripter than of the thesp.

Villeneuve and d.p. Andre Turpin shoot virtually every scene with style and panache, and the sequences in the all-white desert are downright stunning. Music is used sparingly but effectively, with particularly well-chosen rock tracks by Quebec icons Robert Charlebois and Jean Leloup thrown into the mix.