

Sydney Film Festival

Idle Running: a comic story about a lethargic student

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19 August 2000

Idle Running (V Leru) is a charming Slovenian comedy about Dizzi, a disillusioned and somewhat cynical adult-age university student. The film, directed by 35-year-old Janez Burger, who graduated from Prague's Film and Television Academy in 1996, has won awards at several international film festivals.

Dizzi (played by Jan Cvitkovic, who also co-wrote the script with the director) is a veteran resident of a university dormitory in Ljubljana, where he spends most of his time smoking, watching TV and generally wasting time with friends who frequent his room. The film opens with a monologue by the 30-something Dizzi, who declares that any attempt to change the world is futile and that the best philosophy is to do nothing. In fact, Dizzi, who has decided on a life with no responsibility, thinks that sleeping is probably the best occupation.

The lethargic student has established a daily routine that takes him from his bed to his car, then to the nearest tavern or party, and back to his room for more television, booze and trivial discussions with fellow students. Occasionally he visits Eva (Polona Lovcin), who also lives in the dormitory and provides material support of one kind or another. Eva seems to be in love with Dizzi but he remains unmoved by her affections.

Marina (Natasa Burger), Dizzi's longtime girlfriend, is fed up with his cynicism and issues an ultimatum: commit to their relationship and shift into a meaningful and active life, or it is all over. Dizzi responds with a series of counter-arguments telling Marina that she is adapting to what he describes as global hysteria about procreation, planning for a house, kids and other trappings of mainstream society. He just wants to watch the world, see how it looks, and then walk away from

it.

Dizzi manages to maintain his dead-end lifestyle until Marko (Janez Rus), a young and diligent freshman from the country, occupies the vacant bed in his room. This provides the film with some amusing, and for Marko, frustrating moments.

Dizzi is unwelcoming and continues to carouse with his friends while the new student tries to sleep or study. But Marko is not put out and responds in an equal measure with his own positive work habits. He somehow manages to tuck himself under the bed covers and sleep peacefully, even with a game of cards in full swing. At least he will have some quality study time for half a day, while Dizzi recovers from a hangover. Marko, after observing Dizzi changing TV channels with a broomstick, creates a makeshift remote control. This, along with some homemade brandy from Marko, helps Dizzi maintain his horizontal apathy.

The initial indifference and arrogance by Dizzi towards Marko, however, gradually eases, particularly after the arrival of Marko's pregnant girlfriend Ana (Mojca Fatur), who needs somewhere to stay. Marko and Ana's rather simple manners, and innocent sense of humour eventually break through Dizzi's self-absorbed, uncaring outlook.

During a picnic trip with Marko and his girlfriend, Ana goes into labor. Dizzi is propelled out of his inertia and into action to help her. This is a turning point in his life and after the birth of Ana's child, Dizzi decides to move out of the student dorm and end his complacent existence. *Idle Running* does not indicate exactly what he has decided to do, but Dizzi finally appears to have decided on something positive in his life—a far cry from

his former self.

A movie plot based on a few weeks in the life of an indolent student, where nothing extraordinary seems to happen, may appear to be a dull proposition. But *Idle Running* is a worthwhile film with well-paced dialogue and convincing performances by its young cast. The gradual metamorphosis of Dizzi's relationship with Marko and Ana is *Idle Running's* main strength. These warm-hearted scenes seem to evolve organically, almost like a documentary about real roommates. Dizzi's personal appeal and witty comments is another asset of this character-driven movie. Like a big child who refuses to grow up, he is devoid of any insincere and opportunistic traits.

Although *Idle Running* concludes with another trivial monologue from one of Dizzi's former drinking buddies, Janez Burger's film demonstrates that honest friendship, in this case of Marko and Ana, and the simple joys of life can break through the shell of the most hardened cynic. This basic message marks a change from the many pessimistic and sceptical films produced in the former Yugoslav republics in recent years and the glut of mindless commercial films with larger-than-life characters and dazzling special effects. Burger's honest attempt to explore the inner lives of his characters is the strongest aspect of this commendable work by a first time director.



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