HOT-BUTTON HYPE?
The Great Warming

review by George Sax

On the morning of the day I watched Tom Tanno's documentary about the threat of global warming, ***The Great Warming***, I read George Will's newspaper column on the same subject. Will, the *Washington Post*'s high-church conservative, dismissed widespread concern about the issue as largely caused by "journalism calculated to produce it." Liberal mediocratic gaming of the topic, in other words.

The Great Warming does seem certain, and certitude is risky (e.g., Dick Cheney, Paul Wolfowitz), but it also marshals a solid-seeming case. Perhaps a little too solid, you may say. You may feel you should take some notes as a number of experts detail the causes and effects of what they foresee as possibly life-threatening changes from the Greenhouse Effect and temperature climbs. Individually, their testimony is clear enough, even compelling; in the aggregate it can cause circuit overload.

But this Canadian movie's message is assimilable. Its tone is earnest (if sometimes portentous: Smokestacks haven't been "the symbol of progress" for a full 300 years). Canadian scientist Robert Massie emphasizes the source of experts' worries: "Anybody who disputes [the warming thesis] is operating with another planet for a model."

The movie's interviewees, almost all of them respectable technical witnesses rather than political activists, lay out what they believe are the likeliest consequences of climate change: drought, rising ocean levels (New York and other coastal cities are at or below sea level), incapacitating air pollution, extreme heat waves, decreases in food availability. You don't need a weatherman or a political scientist to perceive the dire, dystopian possibilities.

The film's brutal diagnoses are often anomalously depicted in travel-magazine-pretty imagery. But withal, it's a sobering experience.

It's narrated by those two prominent northern exports, Alanis Morissette and Keanu Reeves, and he has never sounded smarter. **av**