

SEEN & NOTED THIS WEEK

PHONE BOOTH (VIDEO) ONE SPUD
LANDSPEED (VIDEO) NO SPUD 4U

SPUD RATING LEGEND

TWO XL SPUDS — Absolute Must See
TWO SPUDS — Worth Checking Out
ONE SPUD — Take It Or Leave It
NO SPUD 4U — Just Plain Sucks



VOLUME 202

**I JUST NOTICED THAT LAST WEEK'S COLUMN HAD
THE SAME HEADLINE AS THE WEEK BEFORE. OI!
TOO MUCH VALARIAN ROOT IN MY MED SCHED.**

If there ever was a perfect day so far this year, I guess this would be it. A good night's sleep in a cool breezy bedroom. Some genuine bits of inspiration on the marketing front. Doors opening instead of closing. A very successful movie meeting that Frank Caruso spared me from having to attend. A perfect omelette. A super sweet piece of watermelon. A good client presentation. Nothing in the way of confrontations, consternation or other encumbrances. A wonderful dinner on the deck with the Wife. A half decent Blue Jays baseball game, which I turned off just before things started to go south for them. Some delicious strawberries. A good movie on DVD. And another good night's sleep.

Now I don't expect every day to be this wonderful, and God knows most of them aren't. But that's why it's wise to just stop for a moment and breathe in the good ones. Breathe them in and hold them in your mind until they are like old friends that you can call up when the shit starts to hit the fan tomorrow.

Sure as hell today (next day) was cold and wet. So much for the idea of stringing two great days together here in the Centre of The Universe.

PHONE BOOTH (JUST BARELY ONE SPUD—FOR MR. FARRELL)

I'm not exactly sure what to make of this movie. On the surface, it looks like an experiment, a kind of hopped-up film school project. Something for director Joel Schumacher to do while he's waiting for the sets to get built on his next big giant film.

This is the story of some dude in New York City played by Irishman Colin Farrell, who seems to get all the meatier American lead character roles these days. Anyway he ends up getting pinned down in this phone booth by a sniper (voiced by Keifer Sutherland). Keifer seems intent on having Colin repent for all his New York City street hustler sins in front of the whole country, which Colin does under extreme duress.

Now this movie is well enough executed I guess. Joel Schumacher isn't exactly your big time people director a la Barry Levinson or Robert Redford and so the acting is all kind of uniformly overdone. Even good old reliable Forrest Whittaker has a moment or two when he steps over the line. Phone Booth creates an incredible amount of tension, and for that reason, it might be worth seeing. But the amount of disbelief you have to suspend to buy that even half the stuff that happens in this movie actually could happen is way beyond ludicrous. I simply don't have that much disbelief suspension capability. There's also a lot of screaming and yelling and carrying on in this film, which gets kind of irritating.

But Colin Farrell, as usual, steps up big time and manages to hold this entire film together solely on the strength of his performance. Sadly, the movie surrounding him is so dopey (contrived), that this performance will go largely unnoticed. Except hopefully by film students who will be studying this movie for its ability to milk a 15 minute Twilight Zone vignette into a paltry one hour and 15 minute feature.

I have to hand it to Schumacher. You gotta have balls of and skin several inches thick to put your name on a 75 minute Hollywood feature that stinks as badly as this one.

LANDSPEED (NO SPUD FOR YOU)

(VIDEO/DVD)

This movie, which attempts to deal with the particular bunch of yahoos (led by Billy Zane) who try to set land speed records, is basically a bunch of nifty footage of supersonic contraptions going really fast on the desert salt flats, surrounded essentially by what is more or less a kind of cinematic prank, masquerading as a low budget, badly acted, hardly directed, poorly designed and awkwardly assembled hodgepodge of wasted celluloid.

This movie sucks on just about every level. The rock and roll sound track is trying way too hard. The actors are trying way too little, but they have nothing of any consequence to work with. The director apparently would rather be screwing the continuity girl and the cinematographer just puts the camera on 'autopilot-flat'. The time frames are wonky. There are way too few extras. Even the voiceover commentary on the big race day is simply awful. But unlike movies that are so bad that they actually turn into unintentional comedies, Landspeed, just turns into a pile of crap. What I can't figure out is how an actor like Billy Zane, who is actually not a bad actor, ends up shaving his head and trying to do a Vin Diesel wannabe role when he's clearly too old and too preppie to ever be able to pull it off.

Movies like Landspeed really do say a lot about the way movies end up getting made sometimes. Obviously Billy Zane needed the money. Obviously the producers

needed a Billy Zane. About 5 minutes into this film, the miscasting of Billy Zane is so painfully obvious, not even the brain-dead would miss it. But Billy's the ticket to ride and so everybody just keeps whipping it till it's dead. It's all so sad, because in the hands of somebody who knew what they were doing, like say Tony Scott, this idea could have become another Top Gun or Days of Thunder. But its not too late, you know, (Hey Tony! I'll write the screenplay), and I'm sure the 40 or 50 poor unsuspecting schlubs (like me), who rented this movie won't mind one bit.

SPUDITORIAL

I had dinner with a couple of people the other night. One of them has just spent the last several years working as a producer for the largest private television and movie conglomerate in Canada. The other works as an account manager in a large design company. We had quite an interesting discussion about television, especially as it pertained to "reality" programming. I recall the television guy taking great exception to any references I made to the audience for these shows as brain dead idiots. The design company guy was strangely silent. The television guy kind of laid out the company line –you know, the real business of entertainment in any form is to make money and that means giving the audience what they want to see. I guess from one perspective that might have been true. But I argued that the reality shows didn't necessarily spawn from any huge consumer insight, but mainly from corporate greed.

In actual fact it came about big time around the same time as the six young actors from Friends and the one slightly older actor from The Sopranos, arguably the two most popular shows on television, were demanding rather gargantuan sums of money for their participation, thus forcing the amortized value of slightly more than billions from syndication sales down to slightly less than billions. That not only pissed the producers off but it also could be seen as setting a set a dangerous precedent, which threatened to jack up the cost per episode of any successful show to rates that could make them unsellable. Couple that with a hyperactive writer's guild making lots of noise on a different front, and all of a sudden the slime lizards on the reality side with their micro talent rates and their unscripted formats started to look pretty good to the greedy broadcasters.

This meant they would be able to hold advertising rates and actually stem some of the ever increasing fragmentation that was eroding their business as a result of the rapid onset of the billion channel universe, which was giving media buyers more and more alternatives to the networks when it came to allocating their budgets. Add to that an American advertising market in a complete state of confusion, a direct result of the events of 09/11 and lo and behold, all of a sudden there is a huge rise in the popularity of reality programming.

Giving the people what they want, my ass! Call me a cockeyed dreamer, but I just can't get it up to believe that we really want to see ordinary people plotting to destroy eachother on one level or another every night, which is what most reality shows use as their main fuel.

The fact of the matter is that most of us who watch TV, while we are not brain dead idiots per se, are watching TV to relax, (guess you could say we're in a self-induced

semi-brain dead state) and generally don't really care as much as we should about what's on, as long as that hypnotic flicking just keeps flickering.

On the way home the design company guy and I talked about this. He expressed a certain amount of disappointment in the attitude of the television guy. And we chatted quite a bit about how nice it would be if mainline television would get back to trying to entertain people in a literate and positive way.

Not that that will ever happen unless there are huge bucks to be made by somebody.

Anyway, that's my two bits worth for this week. I'm going to watch TV. Even though there's probably nothing on.