

SEEN & NOTED

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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 212

I got up this morning and threw on my Hawaiian shirt to celebrate the mid autumn warm spell. Some people call it Indian summer. But the Princess of Pain gets pissed over the reference and insists on calling it Native People's Summer, despite how dopey that actually sounds. The Wife and I watched The West Wing tonight. I am lamenting just how lame and ordinary that show has become with the lack of Aaron Sorkin at the helm and, yes, without the chatty Rob Lowe. It was all about bringing William Devane into the regular cast by nominating him for Vice President and grooming him for the big job, to take over at some point in the future when Martin Sheen's term is up. Jeez, it's only a TV show, and I'm afraid it's only about half the show it used to be. Because William Devane is really kinda your last resort. I'm sure Aaron Sorkin will come up with something neat to watch. Hope he goes to work for Fox and they put his new show on right up against The West Wing. Two can play at this game.

THE RUNDOWN (2 SPUDS)

I've been following the career of The Rock with some interest, and now that Arnie has gone full tilt into politics, he seems to be the likely successor to the action adventure throne. The Rundown is The Rock's 3rd movie, if you don't count the gazillions of TV and closed circuit performances he gives for the WWF (which I don't) In The Mummy Returns and the Scorpion King, he essentially plays the same character, so his role in The Rundown is kind of a breakout and hopefully a sign of things to come. Being a wrassler, the Rock comes to legit movies with a lot of training and screen presence. The fact of the matter is that he's actually a better actor than Arnie as far a delivering lines and creating a character.

The Rundown is one of those hyperactive action adventure movies that owes a lot to Indiana Jones and Romancing the Stone, but hey, there's nothing original in Hollywood anymore. This movie is a hell of a lot of fun to watch, because the director Peter Berg is finally showing what he is made of. After his disastrous directorial debut (note the alliteration), with Very Bad Things (No Spud 4U), I feared the worst, that he would just fade into oblivion and go back to acting whence he came. But The Rundown is a real corker, with a cool story, wall-to-wall action and fun performances by everyone involved, especially Monsieur Rock and his nemesis, Christopher Walkin.

In The Rundown, the Rock plays an intelligent mob enforcer who is sent down to the Amazon somewhere to retrieve the son of his mobster boss. The kid is hanging out in a mining town owned by Christopher Walkin and managed by Walkin's gang of bullwhip totin' Jungle Jims. Needless to say they are no match for The Rock, cause, well he's the Rock.

Having said all that, I have to point out that the real star of this movie is the direction. It's some of the best and most inventive pure action footage put on film since Indiana Jones, and nobody really knows how pure that was anyway. This is one rollicking good time at the movies, cause it's obvious at Peter Berg's intention here is to entertain the hell out of us. And that's exactly what he does. The other thing he does is prove the point that you don't have to turn your movie over lock stock and barrel to Industrial Light and Magic to make it visually stunning and exciting. You just have to do what directors from Charlie Chaplin To Cecil B Demille to Robert Rodrigues to Peter Berg have been doing for almost a century. Tell the story and have a good time doing it.

THE NEW SHOWS

RATINGS SHIFTS

LAS VEGAS – TO ONE SPUD. *I liked the second ep better than the first. It's still a little on the fluffy side, but improving.*

THREAT MATRIX – ONE POINT 5 SPUDS TO TWO SPUDS. *This show is pretty amazing and now has the early lead for Big Kahuna. The only thing that could stop it is another major terrorist attack on US soil.*

THE LYON'S DEN (ONE SPUD)

THE NUTSHELL: *Rob Lowe plays the son of a senator or something who is dragged, via a combination of emotional blackmail and outright extortion, from his brooding life as a legal do-gooder to an even more intensely brooding life as head of the tyrannical law firm which supports the legal clinic where he works. Now in addition to being just brooding, he has to become brooding and ruthless, a hard combo for a prettyboy like Rob to pull off. **FEARLESS FORECAST:** After this show starts to tank because Rob is playing against his chatty in the hallways type (thanks to The West Wing) and it is essentially boring, Rob will start pining for the hallowed halls of The fake White House. By that time (next season), The West Wing's ratings will have*

fallen (because of Aaron Sorkin's departure and the subsequent energy drain that will ensue this season), that they will welcome Rob back with open arms. And it will all be good. Rob back in the White House where he belongs. The Lyon's Den will be in a shallow grave where it belongs and Aaron Sorkin will have some sort of new hit series which I will watch faithfully no matter what it's about.

JOAN OF ARCADIA TWO SPUDS)

THE NUTSHELL: Young Joan (Amber Tamblyn) is a regular teenage gal who one day gets a visit from God. After a reasonable amount of bantering and mystifying stuff, Joan comes to believe this really is God talking to her and starts doing what she's told. Joan is surrounded by an all star cast including Mary Steenbergen (Mrs Ted Danson) and Joe Mantagne (any David Mamet movie), so it's painfully obvious that the powers that be in Hollywood want this show to succeed big time and eventually fill the gap left by the departure of *Touched By An Angel*. **FEARLESS FORECAST:** Joan of Arcadia is 10 times the show that *Touched By An Angel* was. So this objective will probably be achieved and more. A lot of young people will be drawn into it because of the teen focus. But overall, this show is pretty neat, not all pompous and formulaic like TBAA. It reminds me a bit of *Everwood*, albeit not quite as well written. But I'll watch it. And a lot of other people will too. I give it a three-season run, cause it's got lots of legs.

IT'S ALL RELATIVE (NO SPUD 4U)

THE NUTSHELL: A young Bostonian lad who's parents own a waterfront watering hole in Southie hooks up with the daughter of two well to do and sophisticated gay men. Hilarity ensues as they are about to become one big happy family or at least that's the idea. **FEARLESS FORECAST:** This show is a bright and shining example of just how low the sitcom has fallen in an attempt to cash in on the trend to shows involving gays. The gay guys are great. They're bright and witty and well portrayed. However, the same cannot be said for the low cast Irish Catholic trashoids who are the parents of the young Bostonian lad. They are boorish and ignorant and completely disgusting. Anyway this show is crippled by a lot of extremely obvious and tasteless anti-gay sentiment and will die a quick and painful death, I hope. I've been wrong about this kind of thing before. I despise TV like this. Give me *Dogs With Jobs* anyday.

HOPE AND FAITH (NO SPUDS 4U)

THE NUTSHELL: Hope and Faith are sisters. They are played by Faith Ford and Kelly Ripa (two TV manufactured blonde cuties and two actresses who couldn't carry a commercial let alone a whole TV series.) Kelly is an out of work soap opera star and Faith is her housewife sister. Kelly moves in with Faith because she doesn't have anywhere else to go. Hilarity ensues. **FEARLESS FORECAST:** While we're on the subject of how low comedies have sunk, we must also talk about how shrewish these two women feel they need to be to make their parts work. I was able to handle the shrewishness for about 18 minutes. This is formula crap that gives genuinely dumb blondes something to hope for. Six episodes, fewer if there is a god.

KAREN SISCO (TWO SPUDS)

THE NUTSHELL: Elmore Leonard, who is one of the great writers of crime fiction in America was actually a copywriter in Detroit for a while, before he got smart. He worked on cars for D'Arcy. Anyway, Elmore created Karen Sisco for a book called *Out of Sight*, which wasn't so much about her US Marshall character as it was about George Clooney, who played the bad guy. That's 'cause in Elmore Leonard books, there is always a real shortage of good guys. Anyway, Jennifer Lopez played Karen in the movie and the series is basically a continuation of the story and the character.

FEARLESS FORECAST: Because there are so many procedural and forensic style cop shows on TV, this one kinda stands out because the writing is OK and it's more about people than gizmos and microbes. Carla Gugino plays Karen and great character actor Robert Forster plays her dad (true to the book), and they can easily carry this show. Cop shows never need to worry about legs, so this one could last quite a while. It's not great but it's kind of a refreshing break from all the hyperactivity that the boob tube seems to be generating this season. And it's also trying to stick to the quirky character formula that's made Elmore Leonard the best selling crime fiction writer in the galaxy.

COLD CASE (NO SPUD FOR MILES AND MILES AND MILES AND MILES)

There's been a lot of noise about how this show is a direct rip-off of a Canadian show that's been on the air for a few seasons now called *Cold Squad*. The similarities are eerie and well, stranger things have happened. Since there are no original ideas in Hollywood anyway, I guess it's conceivable. Myself, I think they stole it to get even with us for not going with them when they invaded Iraq. **THE NUTSHELL:** Good looking blonde detective starts working on a cold (read old) murder case, does such a damn fine job that she draws the assignment full time. **FEARLESS FORECAST:** The trouble with both these shows is that they are about old crusty cases and people who have been concealing sins for years and years. I'll be honest with you...it's just plain dull as dishwater. It got a good ratings hit the first week out. But so did *It's All Relative* and it was crap. But it's a Bruckheimer and it will at least last the season, just not at Spud Central.

10-8 (TWO SPUDS)

THE NUTSHELL: This is a show about LA County Sheriffs, who are different kinds of cops than the LAPD. I'm not sure how they are different, but there you go. This show features one cop in particular, a trainee played by Danny Nucci and his trainer played by Ernie Hudson (*Ghostbusters*). It's also narrated by Nucci, and like *Karen Sisco* it comes down more on the people side of the cop show world. This show is the Wife's favourite new show and I don't mind it myself. **FEARLESS FORECAST:** TV is trying like hell to establish a counterpoint to the *CSI* style show. This could be a viable contender. The only thing I worry about is that the show is getting a lot of its fuel from the trainee angle. I wonder if won't just turn into another ho hummer when that's played out. Catch it while you can.

That's all she wrote for this week. See you in the funny papers.