

SEEN & NOTED

THE STATEMENT (1 SPUD)
CALENDAR GIRLS (2 SPUDS)
FRIENDS SERIES FINALE (2 SPUDS)
VAN HELSING (2 SPUDS)
COACH'S CORNER (2 SPUDS)

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 228

There is a cool breeze wafting through the slightly gay lace curtains that cover the windows of Spud Central III. It has been a beautiful day. One of those days when you could close your eyes and easily imagine that you had a palm tree in your front yard instead of a big old maple. The warm days have finally arrived and I can't tell you how happy I am about that. The long track pants have been retired to the basement off-season closet. It's nothing but shorts from now till October.

The only reminders of winter left are the NBA and NHL playoffs, the former of which I am watching with less than my usual intensity, even though the Kings look like they might make it to the Western Final with the Lakers. (PS They didn't). The latter, I am watching to see if the Calgary Flames can make it to the Stanley Cup series. (They did). I've become a minor fan of the Flames, since they are the only remaining Canadian team in the playoffs. I like their spunk. They are like a swarm of killer bees. The weird thing about their series with the San Jose Sharks is that the visiting team has won every game. This is really odd in hockey or any other sport for that matter. I also hate to admit it, but I watch every game because I have really gotten to really like a little feature that comes on between the first and second period, called Coach's Corner.

COACH'S CORNER (TWO SPUDS)

Coach's Corner, I just recently found out, has been part of the CBC Hockey Night In Canada telecast for the past 26 years. It has made the Coach of Coach's Corner, Don Cherry undoubtedly the most recognizable Canadian walking the earth today. Although, it could be argued that Don, a master of self-promotion, is pretty good at making himself highly visible. Cherry looks like he dipped himself in corn syrup and then summersaulted through Woolworth's. He is one of the most outrageously dressed individuals I have ever seen. But somehow the look works for him. The two toned shirts with the high stiff tab collars, the outrageous sports coats, super loud ties, spats and the excess jewelry all make him what he is. A real Canadian dandy.

On the political side of the coin, Don is a red blooded Canadian. He's on the record as not being crazy about the influx of European pro hockey players in the NHL, accusing them of being pussies. Afraid to give or take a hard check, which, according to Don, is a pre-requisite in the NHL, or at least it was until all the pansy-ass Europeans started showing up. Don's latest anti-European tirade was the straw that broke the camel's back for him at CBC. Guess they had just had enough of the controversy (mostly engendered by little old ladies from

Cornwall). But Don doesn't care. He's got commercial sponsors up the wazoo. He's got a series of rockem, sockem hockey videos that sell like hotcakes and he's one of the most knowledgeable hockey people this county, which is famous for knowledgeable hockey people, has ever produced. The problem with Don is that his personal philosophy tends to butt heads with the prevailing sentiment that there is too much violence in the game today. So when Don comes on the air in front of how many million Canadians and starts talking about the etiquette of fighting in hockey, which Don is convinced is not an oxymoron, you can see how a whole bunch of Canadians (they're called hockey parents), would get seriously pissed.

I'm not taking any sides here, because I, like Don, accept the fact that fighting is a part of the game and probably always will be, which is why I don't really watch any hockey until the playoffs starts and the fisticuffs miraculously subside.

In spite of his unpopularity in certain circles, it might be argued that nobody in broadcasting with the exception of TSN's Pierre McGuire understands the game as well as Don. He's just a little old school and a lot feisty. How he lasted this long on the CBC is a miracle of modern broadcasting. And, of course it helps to have an ultra loyal base of hockey fans who when cornered and asked for their opinion of Don, will never tell you the real unvarnished truth which is, of course, that they love him.

Hockey Night In Canada will not be the same without Don Cherry, but don't worry about Don. He'll still be around puttin' in his two cents worth every chance he gets. So long, Don. Thanks for the show.

FRIENDS SERIES FINALE (2 SPUDS)

It's so over. And the ads are right about one thing. Thursday night will never be the same. Now there's not a goddam thing to watch except CSI. But it's amazing how you get into little habits. I'm not what you'd call a huge fan of Friends. More like an all lower case fan so on any given night, I can kind of take it or leave it. But when you have two spuds of the female persuasion in the house, you either tape it, watch it or live to suffer the consequences.

Friends is one of those comedies that really did take on a life of its own. It kick started film careers for each of its stars. It put one of them in re-hab, a couple of times. It got one of them married to Brad Pitt. It made TV star salary history. And it managed to do something that few shows on TV have ever done. It managed to grab and hold an audience for ten solid years.

Friends was a well enough written show and God knows that comedy is really hard to write and execute. But I think the real magic of this show had to do with the fact that, while we all know that nobody, not even yuppies on training wheels in New York, ever really acts this way or would allow themselves to be as accessible as all the little Friendazoids did, these people appear to be putting 110% into their performances from top to bottom of every episode. Friends also managed to avoid what I call the "I Love Lucy Syndrome", by putting the characters body into completely unbelievable situations for the sake of furthering the plot and milking the laughs. (except Phoebe agreeing to carry her brother's baby and Chandler in the box at Thanksgiving.).

The low point of this show for me was the whole Tom Selleck era. Tom is a nice enough guy and a half decent actor, but he never seemed to be able to match the energy level of anyone else in the show. The high point for me, which I pointed out to the wife during a fast forward through the commercials was the "Free Porn" episode when one of the porn channels Joey and Chandler's TV became unscrambled and they spent the entire episode in their matching leather LaZee Boys, refusing to miss a minute. I thought this was an absolutely brilliant idea.

Like any passing, the graduation of Friends into full time syndication marks the end of an era. So far, only a very small handful of comedies have exhibited the potential for such longevity. But Raymond is quickly burning out and Will and Grace, while still going strong, has only made it half way. But what the hell do I know anyway? I had really high hopes for Sports Night.

VAN HELSING (2 XL SPUDS)

On Friday, being as it was sunny and twenty, and the first Friday we've had that was actually like that, I found it virtually impossible to get hold of anyone on the phone or by email in the afternoon, so I said to myself, why buck the trend, shut down ops and get to the movies. So I climbed aboard the trusty Diamondback (that's my bike) and headed down to Beaches cinema. On the way I gave a silent prayer that they wouldn't screw this one up, because as you may or may not know the Beaches is the most poorly run cinema in the free world.

I had read a lot about Van Helsing before going to see it, which is something I don't often do, because the conventional press always seems to be so cynical about so called "Blockbuster" movies, which Van Helsing definitely is. True to form, this movie was trashed from here to next week. This, of course, got me pretty much convinced that it would be a decent movie going experience. That and the fact that this film was written, produced and directed by Stephen Sommers, whose Mummy movies are staples in the deja view category here at Spud Central. This guy knows how to make a big movie and have a ton of fun doing it.

Here's a warning I don't often issue. Pop a couple of vitamins before you see this film, because it will literally suck the energy right out of you. This film is like an Indiana Jones movie on speed. There is something visually spectacular happening every 30 second. It's not just eye candy, it's hardcore eyeball marzipan.

Hugh Jackman, who is the true successor to Harrison Ford (ie a movie action hero star who can actually act), plays Van Helsing, a vampire killer in the employ of the Vatican, who after a pitched battle with Mr Hyde (of Dr Jeckel and...) is sent off to good old Transylvania to do battle with Count Dracula.

These types of movies usually come up very short in the story department, opting more often than not to let the visual effects do all the talking. But Sommers has cobbled together a pretty neat tale here, which links up Dracula, Frankenstein, The Wolfman and Dracula's brides in a way that actually makes a bit of sense. And this really does add to our enjoyment of the film because everything that happens, seems to happen for a reason. So you're not sitting there looking for gaffes, you're just enjoying the flick.

From an editorial and production design point of view, this movie is absolutely spectacular. The attention to detail is astounding and every scene is a lush and atmospheric as all get out. There is a hell of a lot of CGI or computerized animation in this film, but it is fairly well integrated with the live action and in a few places manages to raise the bar a notches or two.

The Characters are very cartoon like. Everybody is using some sort of horror film cliché accent, especially Richard Roxburgh, the Aussie character actor who is finally starting to get good bad guy roles. He's got this serious Bella Lugosi thing going on. But what's weird is that the cornier the characters play it, the better it seems to work.

This movie has been #1 at the Box Office for the last two weeks. It'll probably end up behind TROY this week, but this time, it's the people, not the critics you should be listening to. This flick is pretty decent and worth seeing on the big screen.

CALENDAR GIRLS (2 SPUDS)

This is one of those feelgood Britflicks in the tradition of The Full Monty, yadda yadda. Opps sorry, I fell into journalist-speak there for a minute. Whoa. I hate it when that happens.

But actually it is pretty much the same formula. In a nutshell, a bunch of 40 and 50 something middle class British housewives get together to create a provocative (read nude but not revealing in any way) calendar in memory of the dead hubbie of one of them. It's all quite charming and there's a lot of good acting from the likes of Helen Mirren, Julie Walters and John Alderton. The movie kind of bounces along, giving you the distinct impression that middle class women in England are just as bored as middle class women over here and that this gaggle of wifies is participating in the calendar to as much to keep from lapsing into comas as they are to raise money for leukemia research.

As a film, Calendar Girls is easy to watch. There are a few funny bits and Helen Mirren is one of the most magnetic actresses in show business. She's not all that great looking, but there's a real sensual quality about her that certain Spuds find quite alluring. British films like this tend to do very well over here. Triumph of the human spirit and all that. Makes us feel especially good here in Canada where our film culture...well I don't want to go into that because the last time I looked, I was running the remote risk of becoming part of it. Suffice it to say that if there were more ideas like Calendar Girls, which is based on a true story, by the by, we'd have a much healthier and employment intensive film business.

This is not any sort of a guy flick, but I kind of liked it all the same. And the Wife gave it the good housekeeping seal of approval, which means she'll probably buy it at some point.

THE STATEMENT (ONE SPUD)

This is one of those movies that, although it was in English, looks like it was directed by someone for whom English is a second language. It has a very European look and feel to it, even though it was directed by Norman Jewison, a Canadian who is also a Hollywood big shot.

In a nutshell this is a story of a Frenchman, played by Michael Caine, who was complicit with the Nazis in the killing of Jews in WWII. He has been on the lam for about 40 years living in monasteries and other safehouses provided to him by the Catholic Church. At the point we pick up the story, two things are happening. 1. Somebody has glommed onto Mike and is out to do him in and blame it on the Zionists. And 2, the French Government has made him "Crimes Against Humanity Public Enemy #1". Coincidence? Well unfortunately for this movie, we never really find out. If I had found out, I would have tacked on an extra spud, but sadly all this movie has to recommend itself is a really solid Michael Caine performance. But I could argue that you could see that in any one of a hundred other movies that actually had some sort of complete story attached to it.

Anyway, as a screenwriter myself, I was kind of saddened, because Norman Jewison can usually be counted one to deliver the goods. And, from my point of view, this could have been a much more complete story with just a fairly small bit of tweaking.

Oh well, c'est la guerre, as they say.

Well that's about it for this week. Get out there and start workin' on your tans.