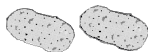




**MY FRIEND
PETER OLIVER IS
CONVINCED IT
SMELLED LIKE
SPRING TODAY.
I WANT TO
BELIEVE HIM...
BADLY.**

PAGE 1 OF 3

POSSESSION



DARK BLUE



AN AMERICAN IN CANADA

NO SPUD 4U

I don't know about you, but I'm starting to get tired of winter. I'm tired of being cooped up in this house, even though it's a nice house and I love it. I'm tired of not being able to ride my bike to the video store. I'm tired of throwing salt all over the place. I'm tired of the way my wool jacket irritates the back of my neck. I'm tired of keeping the windows closed, I'm tired of the words "Shut the Door". I'm tired of shoveling snow. I'm tired of kicking slush off the bottom of my boots whenever I get in the car. And I'm tired to death of soup for lunch.

POSSESSION (TWO SPUDS)

*This movie has been seen here at Spud Central twice in the past week and a bit. The first time, I was at the absolute low ebb of *The Big Cold* and feel asleep about 10 minutes into it. The second time was for the benefit of myself and *The Princess of Pain*, who had decided to honour us with her exalted presence on a Sunday night.*

Possession is one of those really intelligent academic romantic mysteries that attract actresses like Gwyneth Paltrow and in an earlier time, maybe Meryl Streep.

*On one level, this is the story of an American scholar (**Aaron Eckhart**), working as a research assistant for a professor at Oxford or somewhere, who discovers a couple of letters written by an 18th century poet, to whom he's not sure. But because this particular poet happens to be all the rage in academia at the moment, the Yank becomes intrigued by the mystery he's uncovered and soon finds himself hooking up with **Gwyneth Paltrow**, who is a professor at another school. Together, they set about traipsing all over England and France in an attempt to reconstruct the events of the poet's life, and fall in love in the process.*

*This is intercut with a series of flashbacks that show us the poet and his lover (**Jeremy Northam & Jennifer Ehle**) who is also a poet, as their affair builds, blossoms and eventually turns into some sort of Victorian monstrosity.*

The reason I'm telling you so much about the plot is because, like most movies of this kind, the plot is riding way back in the rumble seat, behind the exquisite cinematography, the incredibly beautiful English countryside, the intelligent and poetic dialogue, the interesting characterizations, the witty banter and the Anti-American sentiment displayed by each and every person (with the exception of the Yank himself) in this film at one time or other.

Being a writer, I found this movie fascinating, because it was, at its centre, a movie about literature and the literary life. It was also a movie about being careful what you wish for, because the mystery Gwyneth and Aaron solve is something that might have been better left undisturbed, cause both of them end up feeling kind of like weird literary historian home invaders.

*Nonetheless, a movie this beautiful and intelligent is not something you get to see everyday. **Vatel** was the last one I can recall. In its own way, *Possession* reminded me a bit of **The French Lieutenant's Woman**, (with Meryl Streep), in the way that it inter-*

twined its past and present stories.

Possession is also something that's perfect for home viewing, because it's so well written and played. It should do a hell of a lot better on video than it did in its 15 minutes of theatrical release early last summer.

DARK BLUE (ONE SPUD)

On Wednesday, the Wife and our sister-in-law Sherall were having a **Pride & Prejudice** day. ('cause it takes all day to watch the damn thing), complete with little sandwiches, fine china and tea and maybe even a crumpet. From my end, I was having a hell of a time getting focused, so I headed out to a film up at the Kennedy Commons. It had to be something the Wife would not be pissed off about missing, which narrowed it down quite a bit. I eventually settled on **Dark Blue**. **Dark Blue** is one of those 'gritty, street level' cop movies that used to star guys like **Harvey Keitel** and **Robert DeNiro** before the former got all artsy and the latter became a comedian. This one's got **Kurt Russell** doing a redneck turn on the same type of rogue cop character. Kurt is one of those cops who, at the behest of his boss, **Brendan Gleason** (making a low rent attempt to disguise his beautiful Irish brogue), basically plays fast and loose with the justice systems, ostensibly to take as many bad guys off the street as possible. There are layers upon layers of intrigue in this film, from police corruption to political bullshit. But somehow it was just packaged up all too neatly for me to feel anything other than slightly manipulated. It also takes place in 1991, just as the jury from the Rodney King beating are deliberating the fate of the four officers who whipped his ass. So in typical Hollyweird fashion, there's a big event (the Rodney King Riots) in which to stage the ending of the film and, of course, a burning city for Kurt to look out on after he saves the day, cleanses his filthy soul and makes a deal with the Chief of Police (**Ving Rhames**), to be sent to a less severe hell on earth than San Quentin to do penance for all his wrongdoing.

This movie was well made enough, and Kurt Russell does a hell of a job. There's lots of pathos and irony, big acting assignments, lots of whiskey being consumed and a suitable number of lives ruined...but at the end of the day I'd take a double episode of **NYPD Blue** or **CSI Miami** over it in a heartbeat. Sorry Kurt. You're a good enough actor, get yourself into a series.

AN AMERICAN IN CANADA (NO SPUD 4U) (TWO SPUDS FOR TIMM)

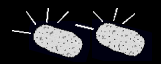
My friend **Timm Zemek** is a Spud and media guy turned character actor, who has just landed a fairly large role in this new CBC comedy. Timm has been sending me and all his other e-pals a lot of advance warnings to watch this show, which premiered tonight. The one-hour pilot which aired last year, evidently won a Gemini award, which for all you non-Canadian Spuds is the Canadian version of the Emmy. Now I'm not sure what kind of competition it had, as I don't recall any other new Canadian-made comedies which premiered last year, and well, I'm just too damn cynical and mainstream to really give much a shit either way.

In **An American In Canada**, Timm plays the manager of a TV station in Calgary (Alberta) who brings up this American newscaster to do the morning show. I like watching Timm because he's a good actor and a



PAGE 2 OF 3

10 CLASSIC CRIME
MOVIES ABOUT LA



TO LIVE AND DIE IN LA
LA CONFIDENTIAL
MULHOLLAND DRIVE
GET SHORTY
BOYS IN DA HOOD
BABY BOY
STRAIGHT TIME
CHINATOWN
YEAR OF THE DRAGON
THE TWO JAKES

naturally funny guy. He plays his part with the kind of clueless zeal that you'd expect. Unfortunately, and I'm sure he'll be both happy and sad to hear this, Timm is far and away the best thing about this show. Because after Timm, the performances fall off into a morass of characters struggling to find their angle of dangle, because the script they are dealing with is, except for the absurdity and civil service irony that Timm projects, completely without focus, humour, wit, sarcasm or any of the other stuff it needs to anchor a good comedy.

Theoretically, this show is kind of in the same category of 'comedy without laff track' that Ken Finkleman's brilliant series, **The Newsroom**, fell into. Unfortunately the dudes who created *An American In Canada*, have nowhere near the prerequisite madness, cynicism, wit or talent required to pull that off. Because there is no laff track, there don't seem to be any punch lines, and so I really just don't know when to laugh. Timm, I love you man, but this show is so unfocused that I don't know how you managed to get through the process without losing some hair. Come to think of it, there was that one rather unflattering shot of your head and...well never mind that.

While this show didn't make me laugh, it did bring up a few tears of sadness, as I lamented the sad state of affairs in Canadian television, especially as it pertains to the CBC. I know the industry is busting a gut to try and carve out an identity that's truly Canadian, trying to define a style that works for us as a people. Yadda Yadda. Unfortunately **An American In Canada** isn't even close. It's not funny enough or visual enough to be a formula sitcom. It's not witty or cynical enough to be Finkleman style work of art. Rick Mercer appears to have nothing to do with this, so it lacks any real sense of satire. I mean, here's a chance to really skewer the Americans, to tear them a new asshole (figuratively) and yet, there's not even a hint of any of that going on. What a wasted opportunity! The guy who plays the American looks pretty wholesome and whitebread like an American should, but he behaves like a candyass who couldn't act his age on a bet. The supporting cast consists of a female producer who looks like she could swing either way, a cute Russian lap dancer/receptionist, a doltish airheaded anchor, a vacuum-headed intern, a Newfie gofer (who is actually mildly interesting), my pal Timm--the bureaucratic station manager, and some East Indian coffee shop guy who makes bad coffee and dispenses even worse advice. Now there's that's not a bad cast of characters. But when these people have nothing work with but drivel, the air comes out that tire pretty damn quick.

The net result was that I had to apologize to the Wife for taking up her time, and both of us, once again, had to get pissed off as we watched our hard earned tax dollars get flushed down the big white porcelain bowl that is, unfortunately, the Canadian TV industry.

What I wish is that everybody who works in the Canadian television industry would tape everything the major networks show on Tuesday night.

(**Jag, The Guardian, NYPD Blue, 24, Frasier**), watch it till they figure it out and then start ripping it off. Maybe then we'd have something that I wouldn't have to feel like some sort of traitor reviewing, because I have nothing nice to say about it, other than that I thought my pal Timm was very good, all things considered. Sorry Timm. Hope you don't hate me. Well. I've done enough damage for this week. I'm out.



PAGE 3 OF 3

SPUD RATING LEGEND



Absolute Must See



Check It Out /
Was Worth It



Take It
Or Leave It



NO
SPUD
4U Just Plain
Sucks