

SEEN & NOTED THIS WEEK

NARC (VIDEO) TWO SPUDS
BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM (BIG SCREEN) TWO 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 199

SO I GET A COLD AND NOW EVERYBODY'S LIKE DON'T KISS ME SARSBOY! SIT AT THE FAR END OF THE TABLE SARSBOY! WHAT'S THAT ALL ABOUT?

I'm sitting here two days shy of the first day of summer with a killer head cold. I've been designing logos all week, and also, as a result of this cold, trying hard to gracefully avoid contact with the outside world. I'm sure I have lost a couple of meaty opportunities as a result, but what can you do? When you feel like a bag of dog poo there's no way you're going to make any sort of a positive impression anyway. Better to just let it slip away for now and figure out some clever way to go back after it later than to go out there, underperform and blow it out yer arse.

I've been talking to a lot of business people lately, and many of them are lamenting the sad state of affairs in this city. You know what I'm talking about, the tempest in a teapot called SARS. People who don't live here have no idea just how insignificant a threat this disease is here in Toronto. From Day One, it's been pretty well contained within hospitals. I've yet to say anyone outside a hospital wearing a mask and this is the first time in nearly a month that I have even thought about it. And that's only because the Wife called me SARSBOY when I tried to give her a kiss during a momentary respite from my sniffing and sneezing.

More than a disease, SARS is a testimonial to the absolute power of the news media to completely distort the reality of this disease and its occurrence, and basically turn the whole world into a quivering mass of Toronto-fearing news victims who have all bought the Big Lie, hook line and sinker yet again. Today I heard that there are nearly 400 cases of SARS in Los Angeles. 400 cases. But, you know what, those Yanks don't give a shit. They're too busy canceling conventions in and avoiding coming to visit a city where this disease is probably as well contained as anywhere on earth.

When the hell is everybody going to start actually finding out what's really going on instead of taking the easy road and listening to a bunch of talking heads from CNN who want you to believe the sky is falling 24/7/365 so they can keep their high profile careers afloat. I've been on this soap box before and frankly, it's kind of

lonely up here. Wise up, eh? And if you want to really avoid SARS keep your asses out of New York City and San Francisco, and San Diego and Los Angeles and Mexico City and Lima Peru...but Toronto? Fuggedaboutit!!! There's nothing going on here that we can't handle.

NARC (TWO SPUDS)

I started to watch this movie with The Wife, The Princess Of Pain and her boyfriend, ArchDuke Ryan of Markham (The Duke for short). Unfortunately the opening sequence was way too visceral for everybody concerned so I adjourned to the second floor viewing room to watch it on my own.

Now Narc is a pretty good indie flick, that somehow or other got seen by Tom Cruise in some early form, and Tom, being the philanthropic Mr Hollyweird that he is decided to lend his name to this film as executive producer, thus assuring that it would get seen by more than the super-serious indie seeking spuds looking for great underground cop flicks that don't star Eddie Murphy or Robert De Niro.

Narc stars Jason Patric and Ray Liotta as two fairly badass cops who are thrown together to investigate and close out the case of the murder of Liotta's former partner. Now if your idea of a cop procedural is a couple of well-dressed New York City smartasses humping around Manhattan all day shooting the breeze and collecting clues from equally smartass New York citizens, (a la Law & Order), this movie will definitely make you think again. This is a rough case in a New York City that looks like something the cat dragged in. It appears that it was shot in colour and then bleached of all but the reds. But the dogged determination that both the cops show in getting to the cause and therefore perpetrator of this crime is something to see. These guys are like junkyard Rottwielers. You have to pry them off this case with a crowbar. Even when the deputy commissioner comes down from his ivory tower to personally tell these guys that the case is officially closed, they keep going. These guys are out for some justice and anybody who tries to stop that train is just asking for it.

Narc was written and directed and probably financed on the credit cards of somebody named Joe Carnahan, who no doubt will have some sort of future in the business. I like movies like Narc because they rely heavily on the actors to make the story work and not the special effects that generally prop up a story's weaknesses. And Patric and most especially Liotta are very reliable actors. For this part, Liotta put on about 40 lbs and grew himself a little goatee and is fairly hard to recognize right off the bat. But he gives one of the best acting performances of the year in Narc. I can't tell you why his performance is so good without revealing way too much, cause it has a lot to do with the complexity of his character, but it's like watching adrenalin flow freely to observe this dude at work. I don't know if the script was 'best actor' material, but he blew me away.

Narc is a tough movie to watch, because it's one of those films that make you think the world is choc-a-bloc with every kind of deviate you can imagine: crack addicts, regular heroin junkies, skanky hookers, pissed-off bodega owners and crooked cops. But apart from that this movie really works well, both as a powerful acting vehicle for Liotta and Patric to a lesser degree, and as a tale of corruption, murder and man's general inhumanity to man.

BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM (TWO SPUDS)

There are a couple of trends in British film making that I am starting to warm up to. The first is the trend to movies about East Indian family life. The second is to movies about soccer or football, as it's known across the pond.

Andrew Smith who is actually marrying an East Indian girl sometime this summer has been bugging me to see this film. I was kind of reluctant because the last couple of East Indian made Britflicks I saw were so so, and I wasn't into spending cinema bucks on it. But aside from the Hulk, there's not a lot I wanted to see and the Wife and I really needed a movie break today, and I also needed a movie to add to this week's column so off we went.

Bend It Like Beckham is an artful and extremely joyful combination of the two aforementioned trends in one very good little film. This is essentially the story of a middle class East Indian teenage girl named Jess, (Parminder Nagra), who lives in the far west suburbs of London, and who worships soccer superhero David Beckham, (who until just last week played for Manchester United.) Jess is also something of a soccer hero herself with skills that can take her to the pros. Unfortunately, her family is very traditional and has a lot of trouble with the whole idea of her playing soccer. They are much more interested in finding her a nice Indian boy to marry, as her older sister is in the process of doing throughout this film.

Bend It Like Beckham is both a simple and a very complex film. It's got all the elements of a typical coming of age movie, but it also touches on about a dozen major hot buttons in British society these days, vis a vis the burgeoning East Indian population. It's written and directed by somebody named Gurinder Chadha, who appears to have a lot of BBC TV movie experience, but is obviously some sort of mover and shaker in the Indian community.

But like most movies of this kind, its real charm is in the characterizations. And this flick is filled to the brim with characters. It's not unlike My Big Fat Greek Wedding, except that it's not mainly about a wedding -- it's about all the crap that Jess has to go through just to keep on doing the thing she loves, which is basically playing soccer.

Like all East Indian movies there is a ton of weird music and a lot of dancing and celebrating of one kind or another. But writer/director Chadha seems to have learned that most of the non-East Indian film goers find Indian music extremely grating on the nerves and so he has made the entire sound track much easier to take overall. He has also created a bright, funny, well thought out and well written script that's full of good-hearted humour and some nice touches of reality. This film is endowed with more than a little pure magic, and is really truly worth seeing for a number of solid reasons. Good script, memorable characters, tons of energy, and a brilliantly comical sexual preference subplot that weaves its way right through the film and makes it all that much more interesting to watch.

There are no car chases, plots to take over the world or superbad people of any kind in this film. And yet I had just as much fun watching this as I did the last James Bond flick. Go figure.

Well that's all she wrote for this week. But do I have some good news. I'm now writing movie and video reviews for a magazine in London, Ontario called *Trenz*. Thanks to my pal Danny Floyd who introduced the publisher Robin Wilkenson to the Couch Potato Chronicles. This should be a lot of fun, unless they decide I'm not trenzy enough and fire my ass. The job doesn't pay much. In fact it doesn't pay anything, but I get a free half page ad to plug the Chronicles, so it can't be all bad. Anyway, this is my first foray into non-virtual print and it should be interesting. It's also a bona fide press credit, which is the first step towards, well, the next step, whatever that is. (Hell, I'm just making this up as I go along.) The only problem is that this is a bi-monthly magazine and the features that I will be reviewing aren't available to see. This will call for some serious bullshit generation on my part as my reviews, will actually be more educated guesses than honest opinions. The video reviews will be a bit easier since I will have actually seen the films. That helps I guess.