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## This Week: *Dances With Wolves*

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**B**etcha thought I was kidding, eh? No, your eyes deceive you not. This week is our 2nd annual humour issue, and in that vein I decided to review this critically acclaimed, politically correct, socially aware, Oscar-laden, three hours and one minute long darling of the screen. As you may have guessed from the foregoing sentence, there is a certain amount of hostility on my part towards this film. I leave it up to the psychology students among you to decide why.

For the three people in the audience (you know who you are) who haven't as yet seen the movie/ read the reviews/ watched Siskel and Ebert to see their cute thumbs/ heard about it from friends/ seen it on the news/ read the back of the case at the video store, *Dances With Wolves* is the saga of U.S. Lieutenant John Dunbar, who is rewarded for his near suicidal heroism on the front lines of the Civil War (he actually was trying to commit suicide. Couldn't get that right either, eh Kev?) by being assigned to an abandoned fort on the frontier. He likes the solitude. He's been assigned to more or less keep an eye on a Sioux tribe camping near the remote outpost. But instead of them killing him or him killing them, the two overcome mutual distrust and become friends. Kind of like an anthropological twist on *Never Cry Wolf*, is it not?

And then, after one hour of John getting to know the Native Americans and one hour of John being a Native American and one minute of credits, it's over. Three hours and one minute total. It'll take 'em two instalments to run it on the networks.

But I digress. Even though it absolutely gushes with sentimentality and social significance, it's actually quite an entertaining film. It's well paced, with its cheap gags or socially relevant symbolic scenes placed in just the right places. The scriptwriter and the director (Kevin

Costner, again) do excellent jobs of banging contrasts together until your ears ring. They play Good Indian/Bad Indian with us by showing the patient, contemplative Sioux against the violent, brutal, unthinking Pawnee. They bash the lifestyle of the Sioux against the "civilized" white man's culture. They cast the difference between white hunter and "red" hunter in a blinding light. You come out of this film punch drunk from all the SIGNIFICANCE. You come out (a drumroll, please) SOCIALLY AWARE OF THE PLIGHT OF THE NATIVE AMERICAN. At least it's not an overtly preachy film. That would have been unbearable.

The calibre of the various actors is another one of those contrasts that bugs me. There are only two parts in this film that are badly acted. Everyone else turns in a sterling performance, from the cavalry assholes to the Sioux children. Stands With A Fist (a white woman raised by the Sioux and John's love interest), played by Mary McDonnell, does a perfect job of portraying her character. Even the stereotypical "hot-headed young warrior" Wind In His Hair is well acted. The wolf and the horse could win Oscars themselves if the Academy wasn't so dominated by other species. But it's those two awful performances that stick in your throat as you try to swallow this unchewable movie. Who are these transgressors who ruin a perfectly good overrated flick? Well, first and least noticeable, the Pawnee Indians as a whole. The Pawnee have at most three lines of dialogue that don't consist of that tried and true howl, "Ah wa wa wa wa wa" and spend much of their time killing lone men in incredibly brutal fashions. Fortunately these embarrassments don't appear on-screen that often.

The second transgressor is Kevin Costner. There is no way around it: the man cannot act. I suspected as much after *Field of Dreams*, but I blamed the script for that (For those of you

who missed it the last three times A.T.V. broadcast it, *Field of Dreams* features long, narrative sentences acted on-screen that explain what Costner's character is feeling without resorting to oh, say, writing an actual script) His wooden voiceovers may be the only thing that kept the film from being five hours long, but they're still wooden and they suck. His physical acting and body language are fine, but Costner delivers all his lines as if he's still lost in that field, telling everybody what he thought of his father. And there's no escaping him because he's in every scene. His B-movie acting makes a lot of stuff in *Dances With Wolves* unintentionally funny. He was much better in *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves*. Wonder why Siskel didn't pick up on that? The one point in his favour, so my sister says, is his butt.

**Stuff to Watch For:** Here's where I usually list the silliest part of the B-movie I'm reviewing. You know, those endearingly stupid parts of a really awful movie that elevate it to sublime slapstick? Well, there are lots of them here. The first five minutes of the movie showing John Dunbar trying to commit suicide by riding a horse down the Confederate front, but no one hits him, let alone the horse; any scene with Two-Socks the wolf in it, because he's such a great actor; the comedy with the horse; the frontiersman who refuses to die even with five arrows in his vital organs; so much blood and guts and violence that even Freddy Krueger would puke; Kevin Costner acting badly; Kicking Bird and Wind In His Hair holding a mafia-like conference on whether or not to kill John Dunbar; the fat little guy who assigns Dunbar his post lapsing into feudal terminology and referring to Costner as a brave knight; and, in a further parallel to *Never Cry Wolf*, a scene where Dunbar confronts an Indians while dressed in naught but his scarf (so fans of Kevin's butt may rejoice, one assumes).

**A Scene To Avoid:** Here's the one scene in the whole film that pisses me off to no end. Near the end of the movie, there's a scene where Two-Socks gets shot at for five minutes by a bunch of Cavalry yahoos before the director decides to stop yanking your chain and they hit him. That PISSES ME OFF! There was no need to shoot the wolf in the first place, because Dunbar's oh-so-cute horse had already been perforated in a drawn-out death scene of its own. There was also no need of dragging out this scene, or indeed showing the death of Two-Socks in explicit detail. I have a soft spot for wolves, you see, and even a faked wolf death send me off on a tangent. I felt like killing the first (and possibly second and third) person I met after watching "Crying Wolf" on *The Nature of Things*, and the Yukon wolf kills going on right now make me want to go hunt some wolf-killers. So this scene left me enraged rather than sad, and all because Costner thought the wolf had to be killed off to maintain the

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