

Welcome to Mooseport

Directed by: Donald Petrie

Starring: Gene Hackman, Ray Romano and Maura Tierney

Yes, the movie is as see-through and spunky as its defunct title. Viewers are "welcomed" with shots of old naked men running down the town's main road. A moose prowling storefronts, and Ray Romano attempting to be something other than...Ray Romano. A movie full of disillusionment and flat humor, *Mooseport* will leave you wanting more.

Comedic moments would have been a good addition to this formulaic picture. The town of Mooseport is in for a big surprise when the former president of the United States, Monroe Cole (Gene Hackman), and an esteemed plumber, Handy Harrison (Ray Romano), run for the title of mayor. Despite the many story opportunities granted in this plot, a race for romance complicates the election in an effort to build morale for these characters. *Mooseport* sounds like it needs some excitement.

Viewers should enter *Mooseport* at their own risk. They may be under the impression that they'll see a good comedy with an exceptional cast, but they will leave wondering if they walked into the wrong movie. Most evidently missing is Ray Romano. He's there in spirit with his nasal New York

accent, but it's almost as if he's a shadow. His work would have been utilized in a more conducive fashion had he collaborated with screenwriter Tom Schulman. Alas, *Mooseport* gives us a Romano that is too much heart and not enough humor. Things seem pretty bleak when viewers learn that the plumber he plays carts around a dog named Plunger.

The remaining cast is confusing as well. Audiences are treated to an unfeeling romance between Gene Hackman's ex-president and his assistant, Marcia Gay Harden. After having been nominated in this year's Academy Awards for a phenomenal performance in *Mystic River*, one can only imagine what possessed Harden to take this role.

It's more than likely that she couldn't pass up the opportunity to work with fellow Oscar winner Hackman. Little did she know that the acting powerhouse would fall flat on his face in a trip similar to that of Romano's. Then again, Harden could have been compelled by the chance of working side-by-side with...Fred Savage. The "wonder" boy once again draws small laughs as the fool with intelligence (think "The Mole" in "Austin Powers").

Despite the waste of talent with the lead ensemble, there are some highlights in this predictable story. Christine Baranski delivers more laughs than any other cast member or plot line in the movie. And Maura Tierney adds another name to her growing resume, as she deservingly moves up the ladder in a career that will someday mirror

that of Jennifer Aniston's. But even these women would not save *Mooseport* from flopping, as there is nothing that could.

In a town where mayoral candidates play "Rock, Paper, Scissors" to determine the first to speak, where a plumber is known for his heart and honesty, and where a donkey is carted around on a helicopter, nothing can be taken seriously. Viewers shouldn't be expected to get involved with this town, let alone enter its "welcoming" arms. Aside from the fact that Romano delivers very few laughs - for all of its zany happenings, audiences will always know what to expect in this story, as there is never even a glimmer of hope for surprise. People won't want to vote for Romano or Hackman in this election - they'll be too busy rooting for the end.

■ - Iris Wiener



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