

Like many tall tales — especially those told in Newfoundland accents — *The Grand Seduction* comes with its own kind of truth.

REELING HIM IN

FILM REVIEW

The Grand Seduction

BY JAY STONE

There's something both charming and ridiculous about *The Grand Seduction*, a Canadian fable about a small Newfoundland fishing village, a big-city doctor, a sexy postmistress and the collapsed fishing industry. It's a fish-out-of-water story with real fish.

The Grand Seduction is the English-language remake of the similarly charming 2004 Quebec film *Seducing Dr. Lewis* (*La grande séduction*), with the same plot: The fishing village, now relocated to Tickle Head, N.L., from remote Quebec, is in an economic funk. Since the collapse of the cod fishery, the entire population is on welfare with an attendant loss of dignity. There's a chance that a big factory may open nearby — a "petrochemical byproduct repurposing facility. They make jobs," someone says — but to qualify, the village must somehow talk a physician into moving there.

A target soon appears:

a sweet and unlikely hunk named Dr. Lewis (Taylor Kitsch) who is blackmailed into making the move. In this version, he is found with cocaine by an airport customs agent and coerced into spending time in Tickle Head or face charges. It's just one of the strange twists in *The Grand Seduction*.

Kitsch, a man of blandly spectacular good looks, seems too young to be a plastic surgeon and too innocent to be a cocaine addict, and he struggles throughout the film to make the doctor more than a

pitch on a rocky outcrop and making cricket whites out of old bed sheets and towels.

This is raucous fun, in its bizarre way, but it turns the movie into a satire on a convoluted and slow game that has little connection to Canadian culture. It's only part of the seduction. The Tickle Head residents spy on Dr. Lewis so they can turn the tiny harbour into his idea of paradise. Hearing that he likes Indian food, the local restaurant launches a lamb dhansak festival. People pretend to like fusion jazz, his preferred form of music. Dr.

foundland accents — it comes with its own kind of truth.

Gleeson dominates the film with an irresistibly immoral air of mischief and an authentic voice ("I'm going to tell you one ting, and it's not another") that gives *The Grand Seduction* the perfect tone: universal and specific at the same time.

Director Don McKellar fills the harbour with some great worn faces, including a lovely turn by Gordon Pinsent as Simon, a town elder whose blue eyes practically twinkle with both drunken complicity and sober reservation. Off to the side, almost on her own, Liane Balaban plays the pretty postmistress who becomes another of Tickle Head's attractions, although she and Kitsch have little of the chemistry that would help sell the notion.

In fact, the real seduction isn't of Dr. Lewis, but of us. It was filmed in striking Trinity Bay, and there's a rough and real beauty to both the setting and the people. You'd want to live there if it weren't for the cricket. ★★★

Postmedia News

The Grand Seduction
opens wide May 30.

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collection of comic tics. These include a fondness for the game of cricket, which becomes the foil for much of the humour in the film.

The townsfolk — led by Murray French (Brendan Gleeson), a sly conniver of great, grizzled charisma — tailor their village to the doctor's passions. They pretend to be cricket fans, building a

Lewis never knew his father, so Murray, in a rather cruel twist, takes on a paternal role, teaching Dr. Lewis to fish and even arranging for him to catch a big one.

Eventually, the film starts to feel a little mean, and also a little long (it could be cut by 10 minutes). You don't believe a word of it, but like many tall tales — especially those told in New-