

Loose Cannons ★★½

Year of Release: 1990

Review by Randy Parker

Country: USA

Verdict: Skip It

Dan Aykroyd's film roles come in two basic flavors: deliciously funny (*Dragnet*) and dreadfully bland (*My Stepmother Is an Alien*). Sadly, Aykroyd has spent most of his career wallowing in mediocrity. In *Loose Cannons*, he is stuck in a generic buddy-buddy police thriller with an unnecessarily overblown plot. But fortunately, Aykroyd's character this time out is a winner: the movie provides the actor with one of his juiciest film roles yet.

Aykroyd plays Ellis Fielding, a police forensic expert who possesses incredible powers of deduction. He can take the scantiest of clues and produce brilliant conclusions. He makes Sherlock Holmes look like an amateur. Fielding is essentially a nerdy weirdo; he wears bow-ties and uses expressions like "query" and "energy patterns." And to top it off, he has a troublesome personality disorder: the detective is extremely sensitive to pain and violence. Whenever he encounters them, he loses it. That is, he assumes multiple personalities, everything from the Cowardly Lion to Dirty Harry, Captain Kirk, and the Lone Ranger. Aykroyd nails the part home with his wild impersonations, but more importantly, he also brings tenderness and vulnerability to the role. Fielding cannot control his schizophrenic outbursts, and his frustration is genuinely compelling.

Gene Hackman co-stars as Mac Stern, Aykroyd's reluctant partner. Stern is yet another variation on Hackman's typical role, the everyday Joe, except this Joe is a bit more eccentric than most. For instance, he seems to live in his car, which is cluttered with cat food and kitty litter. The character is fairly run-of-the-mill, but Hackman's performance is far from ordinary. He elevates the role above and beyond what's written on the page, making a potentially dull character come to life.

Loose Cannons is strictly a genre film in that it gives you exactly what you expect. There are no surprises. The story starts with reluctant partners who argue and get on each others' nerves, and it ends with them having forged a close friendship. Fortunately, *Loose Cannons* meets the key requirement for a good buddy picture: it has likable partners who share a humorous repartee. During the comic moments, the film rolls along at a steady clip.

In many ways, however, the movie is an exercise in frustration. *Loose Cannons* is not content to be just a comedy. Unfortunately, it also tries to be a thriller, and not just any old thriller, but one involving international intrigue and political conspiracy. The movie has what I like to call a "James Bond story line"—in other words, a hopelessly elaborate and convoluted plot. In fact, I won't even bother to describe the plot, except to mention that it involves a band of evil Germans, some inept FBI agents, the Israeli secret service, and a triple X-rated porno film starring Adolf Hitler. After a while you throw up your arms and lose interest in the story. After all, it's just an excuse to bring Hackman and Aykroyd together.

As with most comedy-thriller hybrids, it's hard to swallow the whimsical humor and somber violence in one gulp. The decapitations and homicides shatter the film's comic momentum. In this case, screenwriters Richard Matheson and Bob Clark also seem to believe that there is nothing quite as fascinating as a car chase. The movie has two chases, or ten minutes of wasted film.

Matheson and Clark's story line is in extremely poor taste. Hitler, Nazis, and the strained relationship between Germans and Jews are sensitive issues, ones which should never be used as superficial plot devices. They have no place in a comedy, unless it's a full-blown farce, like *The Producers*.

The bottom line is that the buddy-cop-picture is a genre which should be put out to pasture. We've seen every conceivable variation, including the cop-dog buddy movie and the cop-ghost buddy movie. Hollywood screenwriters are obviously getting desperate for new ideas; if they stretch the genre any further, it's going to burst.

Even with its numerous flaws, however, *Loose Cannons* succeeds as mindless entertainment. It's hard to resist the combination of Aykroyd's hysterical impersonations and Hackman's easy charm. The actors squeeze two hours of fun from the wildly uneven screenplay. At the very least, Aykroyd fans will be satisfied: his Road Runner impersonation is worth the price of admission. Beep! Beep!