

CBC's *Intelligence* takes you on a wild ride

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'You'll fall in love with our lineup,' declares CBC in its ads for the new season, which officially begins tonight. And when CBC goes a-woooing, watch out.

In fact, it's not so much an exercise in wooing as it is a promise of porno-style action. "More Sex, Drugs and Espionage" is the slogan for the second season of *Intelligence*, which returns tonight. "Sex, Betrayal, Corruption and Desire" screams the press announcement for *The Tudors*, which begins tomorrow. Okay, okay we get it. CBC is the lechery and leg-over channel.

Intelligence (CBC, 9 p.m.) is certainly sexy, but not in any crass fashion. And in truth it has received ludicrously little promotion from CBC. The promotional emphasis has been on the marginally-Canadian production *The Tudors*. *Intelligence* is a superbly-crafted crime drama, with loads of action and layer upon layer of compelling intrigue. On the evidence of the first two episodes, it's better than ever - a cranked-up, speedy thriller that grabs you in the first few minutes and takes you on a wild ride.

When we last saw Jimmy Reardon (Ian Tracey, still niftily underplaying the criminal) he was trapped in the washroom of a Seattle restaurant, having just realized that he's been set up and that the place is crawling with U.S. agents who want to arrest him. He called his wife Francine (Camille Sullivan), that woman we know to be unreliable and manipulative, and said he was sorry for stuff.

Does Jimmy escape? Of course he does. He has to, for the series to continue. But what an escape. Outside the restaurant, sitting in a car, is that creep, Canadian agent Ted (Matt Frewer). He is so anxious to eliminate Jimmy that his bony frame is practically vibrating. Beside Ted, a U.S. agent tells him to calm down. "When Reardon takes the money, we're gonna grab him, okay? Nobody's gonna get shot."

Yeah, right. Jimmy's escape in a hail of gunfire is a small masterpiece of staging - a swift, breathtaking scene of chaos and blood. It's all movement and commotion. Then Jimmy's on the run, in the United States, no less. And hardly anybody knows that he's actually a valuable informant to the Organized Crime Unit (OCU) and its head, Mary Spalding (Klea Scott). Now he's just another criminal on the run, alleged to have shot a DEA agent.

Meanwhile, back in Vancouver, there's a dead man in a hotel room. He's the deputy director of CSIS, and as we discovered at the end of last season, also a mole for the Americans. The situation is kinda tricky for Mary. Over at the Chickadee strip joint, centre of the Reardon operation, Jimmy's right-hand man, Ronnie (John Cassini), is frantically trying to help Jimmy get back to Canada. A small distraction is the strong possibility that the Reardon operation's "banker" is about to vamoose with a whole pile of illegally acquired moolah.

You get the picture - *Intelligence* is faster, sleeker and more action-driven than ever. It's still essentially about the subtly toxic relationship

between informers and their handlers, a relationship that highlights the casual corruption of both sides in the war between cops and criminals. But along with the moral conundrums, there is a taut, visceral tension.

Intelligence didn't attract vast numbers of viewers last season, but clearly achieved a growing number of fans by the time it ended. The number of readers asking me about its return grew and grew when it was repeated this past summer. It is also a hit internationally, being seen now in dozens of countries. It seems to have been particularly successful in Australia, where it has garnered glowing reviews and strong viewing numbers.

Airing tonight... December 3rd

Intelligence is heading at a breakneck speed toward its season conclusion. And it has been superb lately. Not only is the series deftly plotted and gripping, it is an allegorical drama about the Americanization of Canadian culture. We have a very Canadian, very complicated hero in drug boss Jimmy Reardon (Ian Tracey) and viewers have watched as Reardon faces endless attempts by U.S. forces - both legal and illegal - to destroy him and take over his business. We've seen CSIS grapple with a secret Canadian business organization intent on selling major Canadian assets to the highest bidder. On *Intelligence* we've seen the frailty of what we call our own in a thrilling drama about spies, lies and drug barons.