



The Insatiable Moon

ARTHOUSE

DOWN BUT NOT OUT IN PONSONBY

UNDERDOGS TRUMPING OPPONENTS

is a well-worn cinematic storyline, but when the underdogs are a gaggle of winos, mental health patients and a sex predator fighting eviction from a boarding house in deepest Ponsonby, you might think the film-makers have set themselves an impossible task to win over an audience. And while it's true the film has a love story at its heart, the romantic pairing of a well-off, educated, married Pakeha woman with a penniless Maori with mental health problems might also seem so unlikely as to stretch credulity.

But Mike and Rosemary Riddell (as writer and director respectively) have such a compassionate view of life — tempered with a wry sense of humour and willingness to address the sordid — that they manage to turn the ordinary into the extraordinary, the implausible into the plausible.

The film turns on simple oppositions, epitomised by the contrast between Rawiri Paratene as barefoot, messianic Arthur, glowing with goodness as the self-

proclaimed second son of God, and the tight-lipped Brian (John Leigh), locked into a barren marriage with community worker Margaret (Sara Wiseman). Or the clichéd venality of a local real estate agent set against the good-hearted boarding-house manager Bob (Greg Johnson).

It's also a film that subscribes to received ideas, notably that the dispossessed — unencumbered with material goods — have a simple enjoyment of life, and that Maori are a particularly spiritual race.

But the Riddells drip just enough vinegar into the syrup to make the story credible — most notably in a funeral scene, where a mother castigates the dead man, John, for having molested her daughter.

And most of the raggle-taggle band of housemates look, and act, convincingly like misfits, with their skewed spectacles, raggedy clothes and bad table manners. Even the unctuous local vicar gets to swear.

The film's success rests to a large extent on convincing performances from

DVD

IN THE HEAT OF THE NIGHT (1967)
DIRECTED BY NORMAN JEWISON



When a black city detective (Sydney Poitier) visits his hometown in the redneck south, he is initially suspected of involvement in a murder simply

because he is a negro at a railway station late at night. But this tale is less about that murder investigation than about the relationship he forges with the boozy local sheriff (Rod Steiger), who slowly comes to respect his colleague's humanity, intelligence and skill. Artfully combining a murder story and character drama with a liberal's view of racism, Jewison created an atmospheric tale suffused with the clammy heat and prejudice of the south, only a few years after the Civil Rights Act banned discrimination against blacks in employment and accommodation.

the leads, with Wiseman and Paratene so compelling you are willing (just) to overlook the improbabilities of their illicit relationship. They are ably supported by the rest of the cast — particularly Johnson as potty-mouthed, irascible Bob and Ian Mune as a loveable dero.

And if the direction is occasionally clumsy, it is nevertheless always lively, the dialogue is dependably good, and the shots of the Waitemata below Herne Bay and Pt Erin show off the city's stunning foreshore to advantage.

The Film Commission initially contributed a small amount towards script development but declined to finance the production of this charming tale of being down but not out in Ponsonby.

With a British distributor already signed up, however, it may well be one underdog the commission will come to regret not backing.

GRAHAM ADAMS ◀

THE INSATIABLE MOON
DIRECTED BY ROSEMARY RIDDELL