

TNT's "Leverage" Infiltrated by Oklahoma Fans?

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One of the shows I like to watch with my wife and teenage kids is **Leverage** which stars (as TNT is constantly reminding us in promos) "Oscar winning Timothy Hutton". Actually the rest of the cast is pretty good too. This escapist drama is about a team of skilled criminals who have turned into white knights - taking down fat cats and power bosses on behalf of the little guy. The show reminds me of the slick British drama **Hustle**.

Normally I like Leverage. It is a fun and quirky romp that doesn't take itself too seriously. There is always a "gotcha" moment where you finally figure out how they make the big score. Unfortunately, Last night's episode "The Tap Out Job" was a huge disappointment in what has been an otherwise entertaining group of episodes. Why you ask? Well it became painfully obvious to me (and anyone else who has visited, driven through, read about, seen pictures of, flown over, or watched "The Tonight Show" before 1992) that the writers of Leverage are either too lazy to do any actual research or they are ignorant, prejudice, and snobbish with little experience outside of a the cocoon of Hollywood. If you want my no holds barred reasons why - read on.

Lincoln as a One Horse Town

First, the setting was supposed to be Lincoln Nebraska. Lincoln is a bustling college town of more than 250,000 people. It rises up off the prairie like an urban oasis. It boasts a huge, world class college campus, copious restaurants, plenty of shopping, and the state capital. Leverage however, chose to show it as sleepy, rural, economically depressed town with little activity - largely populated by out of work meat packing employees. When the villain's henchman turned to him and said "They are staying at the Gurdy Hotel", the villain said something like "Ethel works the front desk there - find out what you can". Apparently we have no upscale hotel chains and everyone in the city is on a first name basis.

Omaha and Lincoln are closely linked and a mere 45 minute drive from each other. Omaha is the home of the "Oracle of Omaha", Warren Buffet - the world's richest man. It is a place reputed to have more millionaires per capita than any other city in the US. While this is unsubstantiated, seeing as how I can't walk 2 blocks without almost being run over by a Lexus or a BMW, I tend to believe it. Yet all the folks in the show were down on their luck farmers or laborers. Elliot (one of the characters) says at one point that fight clubs are popular here. What? I have never even *heard* of an fight club here. He goes on to say that the fighters are just looking for a way out because the "plants are closing and the corn is burning up" (or something like that). It's true that Nebraska is Corn country - but it is hardly a dust bowl. Ag producers are having a bumper year on top of 2 or 3 bumper years. Unemployment is lower than the rest of the country and folks here are far more likely to be working in finance or technology than they are in manufacturing. In the words of Shrek, "What a load of tripe!"

What's with the Accents?

For some unexplained reason (like perhaps the producer was from Antarctica) All of the characters spoke with a slow drawl. Now I have nothing against a slow drawl. I went to school in the Ozarks and some of my best friends liked to examine every side of a word before getting it out. But Omaha and Lincoln folks speak with clear

Midwestern English. Omaha is the telemarketing capital of the US because of the fact that folks here speak without regional distinctiveness. The villain at one point was described as "Barney Fife" and he sounded like him too - as if a slick high finance villain (like the ones they fight in New York and LA) couldn't possibly be found in back water Nebraska.

Chicken Fried Steak?

One of the characters laments the fact that "all the food on her plate is brown" and she is told it is "chicken fried steak" - to which she responds that "meat should never be used as an adjective". A quick survey of all the restaurants in the 2 mile area around my office indicates that *none* of them serve chicken fried steak. Fish Tacos, smoked salmon, chop salad and shrimp scampi yes - but no chicken fried steak. I know that they serve it at Cracker Barrel (a Midwest chain found near Interstate exits), but it is mostly a *southern* dish - not a *Midwestern* dish.

Nebraska is beef country and Nebraska beef is some of the best quality in the world. She couldn't find a filet? Or a salad? Later in the show she is eating at the country club and what are they serving - again, chicken fried steak. Where did these writers get the idea that Chicken fried steak is a Nebraska dish? It's like everything they know about Nebraska they seemed to have learned from "In the Heat of the Night". Frankly I was surprised they didn't throw in power mad tin-pot sheriff.

The Final Straw

The final straw came when they chose to poke all Nebraskans in the eye with a dig at our college football team. One of the characters is a good looking, athletic, black actor who plays the technology guru (which they lamely call a hacker). At some point in the show he finds himself at a public event and he is approached by a group of screaming girls looking for his autograph. He says (and I'm quoting here), "For the last time I am not the tailback for the Cornhuskers". After they left I believe I heard him say under his breath, "I don't even know what a Cornhusker is".

Where to begin? First of all, Nebraska people do not automatically assume than any athletic looking black man plays for the Cornhuskers - and the idea is offensive to me as well as to most Nebraskans. Secondly, we actually *know* what our football players look like - we see them in the paper and on TV and on the field just like everywhere else in the US. Finally, how can any college football fan not know the legendary Cornhuskers? Even if you are not from the Big 12 you still know who they are. They have 4 Heisman Winners, the best winning percentage in the last 50 years, a mind boggling string of sell outs at memorial stadium and 5 championships - 3 of them in the 90s. It is really asinine to suggest they are some backwater team he's never heard of - particularly since we saw this same actor in season one absorbing 5 football games simultaneously on his array of fancy-pants plasma screens.

My Best Guess

I've thought long and hard about how these folks got it so unforgivably wrong. My best guess is that either the writers are Oklahoma fans or they are jaded, evil, shallow, worthless, soulless shells of human beings with a pathological inability to see value in anything between California and the New York..... I sure hope they are not Oklahoma fans (shudder).