

Guibord s'en va-t-en guerre

☆☆**1/2**

Directed by: Philippe Falardeau

Starring: Patrick Huard, Irdens Exantus, Clémence Dufresne-Deslières, Suzanne Clément

Running time: 108 minutes

The timing of the release of *Guibord s'en va-t-en guerre* couldn't be better. Writer-director Philippe Falardeau's smart political satire (<http://montrealgazette.com/entertainment/movies/philippe-falardeau-casts-a-vote-for-political-comedy-with-guibord-sen-va-t-en-guerre>) lands on Montreal screens in the middle of the federal election campaign, and the film's lighthearted spoofing of our politicians' foibles has a pulled-from-the-headlines feel.

There's even a grey-haired Conservative prime minister you could swear is a carbon copy of Stephen Harper. He's played with uncanny accuracy by Paul Doucet, though Falardeau slyly doesn't give this fictional PM a name.

Falardeau's themes are also particularly timely. Though it's a laid-back laughier, *Guibord* tackles some heavy-duty fare, notably the question of just how democratic our parliamentary democracy is and just how cynical our politicians can become. It's not giving much away to say there is some cynicism on display here, especially from the Harper-esque PM. But it's a Falardeau film, so it's far from relentlessly bleak.

Au contraire, it's mostly a lot of fun, and it may well be Falardeau's most accessible film. But it doesn't carry the same emotional weight as *C'est pas moi, je le jure!* or *Monsieur Lazhar*.

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The film — clumsily titled *My Internship in Canada* in its English version — starts with a brilliant notion: One man holds the fate of Canada in his hands. Steve Guibord (Patrick Huard) is a former Liberal Party MP who is now an independent member of Parliament for the far-flung northern Quebec district of Prescott-Makadewà-Rapides-aux-Outardes. The House of Commons is set to hold a crucial vote on whether Canada will go to war, and guess who has the deciding vote? Ben oui, it's Guibord, and he's not happy about this state of affairs.

Guibord is a homespun kind of guy. He is famous for his youthful exploits as a junior hockey player, but he had to hang up his skates after being drafted by the Chicago Blackhawks when the team realized he suffered from a seemingly debilitating fear of flying.

The problem is that Guibord doesn't have an opinion on the war. Early on, a fresh-faced, idealistic intern from Haiti named Souverain Pascal (Irdens Exantus) turns up on his doorstep, and Guibord takes him on as his assistant, initially more out of pity than anything else.

"There's no secret, you have to stay close to the people," Guibord tells Souverain, and with those words in mind, they devise a plan to poll the locals as to which way he should vote.

He's also catching heat at home, where his wife, Suzanne (Suzanne Clément), wants him to vote for *la guerre* and his granola daughter, Lune (Clémence Dufresne-Deslières), is pushing him to take a stand against the war.

Add in the aboriginal community that is blocking the local highway and truckers who are blocking another road in reaction to the aboriginal blockade, and you have one huge political mess.

Oh — and the prime minister who's not named Stephen Harper is trying to bribe Guibord by giving him a cabinet position in return for a war vote.

"You're a closet conservative," he tells Guibord.

Huard is perfectly cast here. As in *Starbuck*, he's so at home playing an ordinary guy stuck in an extraordinary situation. Exantus also brings much charm to his role. It's often very funny, but once the chuckles fade, you might end up wishing the political satire had cut just a little deeper.

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