

# REEL R

★ ★ ★ **The Big Easy**  
*Royal Park*

Dennis Quaid plays a New Orleans detective who has a sinewy, cajun-spiced, rattlesnake of a voice that curls over, under and around every woman he meets. It's the type of voice that could charm the skin off an alligator and then turn around and sell him the shoes.

With a voice like that (and a rakish grin to boot), we're not surprised when he slowly charms the socks — and quite a bit more — off of the new assistant D.A. (Ellen Barkin).

She's a fidgety federal agent who specializes in uncovering police corruption.

Sure, Quaid's character takes a little on the side. But he's one of the good guys and we're happy to see him loosen up the tightly wound investigator. She, however, would rather remain tight.

People — well, low-life criminals — are being killed and the D. A. has a hunch that it entails more than a local rivalry. Quaid isn't so easily convinced, but he is sure that he's

attracted to her, if only because she proves so difficult to snare.

Slowly, Barkin is won over by his smile and his strut. Their mature, emotional relationship becomes the centerpiece of this well-executed police drama.

It climaxes with a very erotic sex scene; one of the best of the year. Quaid is the center of the film throughout, but here he is upstaged by Barkin. Confusion, shyness, trepidation and pleasure flit across her face, convincing us that she is experiencing love for the very first time.

Their acting, along with an excellent supporting cast, support the nominal storyline. It is a mystery marred by that old movie giveaway: a major actor in what appears to be a minor role.

Still, that and even a desultory ending can't mar what is essentially a fine drama. *The Big Easy* is peopled with bayou eccentrics who laugh, dance, hoodwink each other and even find time to wrangle with some serious moral dilemmas. It even manages to fool us into believing the oldest trick in the book: two people falling in love.

By Michael Giltz