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'No Clue' review: Brent Butt in similar role

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FIRST POSTED: THURSDAY, MARCH 06, 2014 02:55 PM EST | UPDATED: THURSDAY, MARCH 06, 2014 03:13 PM EST



Amy Smart and Brent Butt in "No Clue."

Fans of Corner Gas can appreciate the low frequency at which Brent Butt's comedy operates. It's like staring at one of those "hologram" paintings and finally seeing the image beneath.

No Clue, directed by Carl Bessai, is Butt's post-Corner Gas movie debut. It's a modern-day takeoff of the old Bogie-Bacall dame-hires-a-detective noir films. And I started to "get" it about half-way through, but it's a slow build.

No Clue is a pretty dry comedy, with a lot of sly set-pieces and (from me) at least a couple of outright laughs. This is a comedy where people saunter from one life-and-death situation to another, without dramatics or intensity. At the center of it all is Butt, channeling Bob Hope, reacting to every plot curveball

with genial sarcasm.

He is playing himself, essentially the same guy you saw in Corner Gas, but minus the rep company of fleshed-out, smalltown oddballs. (Accent on the minus. This is a movie that could use at least one over-the-top, high-volume character, maybe someone who could call the lead guy a "dumbass" once in a while.)

That guy could have been David Koechner (Anchorman), who is in far fewer scenes than the trailers for the movie might make you believe, and is hemmed in comedically by playing the voice-of-reason best friend.

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No Clue

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Starring: Brent Butt, Amy Adams

Directed by: Carl Bessai

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In No Clue, Butt plays Leo, a small-time salesman specializing in foam fingers, personalized pencils and other tchotkes. Into his life walks Kyra (Amy

Smart), an apparently distraught woman who has apparently mistaken his office for that of a private detective down the hall.

The underrated Smart is actually terrific at playing manipulative-sexy, having done it in Rat Race and lately on TVs Justified. Her tale here involves a missing brother who is a genius video-game designer, and whose list of plausible enemies stretches from co-workers to competitors.

What follows is a series of contrivances whereby Leo crashes corporate gaming events, clumsily trying to shake the guilty consciences of guys in designer suits, runs across crime scenes and is repeatedly threatened by buff guys a foot taller than him. (There's a decently written scene where he talks a few of them into beating each other up).

There's not much in the way of character development, and really not much in the way of characters, apart from Leo and Kyra. But Brent-Butt-the-writer sprinkles the script with sly wordplay. Some of it is of the faux Raymond Chandler variety ("Her breath was warm, like a fat guys ampit").

And some are practically asides to the audience, again a la Bob Hope, as when Leo has a gun pulled on him for the umpteenth time ("Why does everybody have guns? This is Canada!").

A movie star isn't exactly born here. But he does kick a few times in utero.

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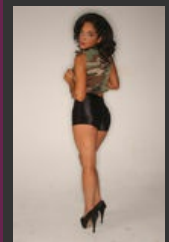
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