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Uma Thurman Luke Wilson

**My Super
Ex-Girlfriend**



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Sexual Content, Crude Humor,
Language and Brief Nudity.

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Jeff Anderson and Brian O'Halloran in *Clerks II*

TOIL AND TROUBLE

Clerks II

review by M. Faust

For a sequel to one of the keystone “indie” films of the 1990s, *Clerks II* arrives in theaters this weekend with a surprising lack of promotion from the stodgy old Hollywood studio that is distributing it. Maybe they assume that no promotion is needed, that fans of *Clerks* will line right up for it without prompting.

They’re not entirely wrong there. If you’re a fan of the original, you’ll love the sequel, even if you’ve been disappointed by much of Kevin Smith’s output in the intervening decade. After pouring his soul and years of his life into the bland *Jersey Girl*, Smith has refound his voice as a spokesman for underpaid, uneducated suburban white boys with no other way of asserting their identities than making fun of everyone who wanders into their path. In the words of the original film’s tagline, “Just because they serve you doesn’t mean that they like you.”

Ten years after the day that seemed like it would forever change the life of Dante Hicks (Brian O’Halloran), we see that his life hasn’t changed very much at all. He and best friend Randal Graves (Jeff Anderson) aren’t working at the Quick Stop anymore, but only because the place burned down. Instead, they now earn their minimum wage paychecks as employees of Mooby’s, a fast-food joint where you can follow up your specialty Cow Tipper burger with a Cow Pie dessert.

Randal doesn’t seem too bothered by the prospect of turning 33 and still living at home. Mooby’s offers him lots of customers to snicker at behind their backs—or to their faces, if he’s in a particularly surly mood—and a free Internet connection which he uses to conduct flame wars with bloggers.

The more introspective of the two, Dante has found a way out. He is engaged to Emma (played by Smith’s wife Jennifer Schwabach), a former high school heartbreaker whose parents will provide them with a house and employment operating a car wash in Florida. His constant justifications of his plan on what is supposed to be his last day in New Jersey make it clear that he’s not at all sold on the idea. And the moment we see how he looks at the Mooby manager, we know where his heart

really lies. She’s played by Rosario Dawson, who is almost too exotically beautiful to be in such a working-class movie, and one can only presume that the Smith-Schwabach marriage must be strong indeed for her to tolerate being cast in her husband’s movie as the obviously lesser choice. (Or maybe uxoriousness misleads Smith to regard the competition as a draw; that would certainly explain the plot’s essential lack of tension.)

But if the plot is thin on surprises, the dialogue isn’t. Facing the impossibility of shocking audiences the way he did with the first *Clerks* and the need to satisfy fans expecting more seems to have brought out the best in Smith as a writer, who concocted a barrage of bawdy sexual discussions and pop-culture arguments that are hilarious but never too over the top (the closest he comes is a record number of uses of the phrase “ass to mouth”). The actor who most benefits from this is Anderson, whose Randal character would be unbearably obnoxious without the care Smith took in crafting his endless profanity. And he provides him with a suitable foil in Elias (Trevor Fehrman), a wide-eyed young Christian co-worker who drives Randal berserk by insisting on the superiority of *The Lord of the Rings* to *Star Wars*.

The original *Clerks* was enjoyable because as much as its characters moaned about their miserable lives, we recognized that they were young enough to be outgrow this slacker phase (and if you can’t slack off when you’re young, when can you?). This sequel is inherently more serious because Dante and Randal’s options are slipping away: you can’t toil at a minimum wage job forever without starting to have some severe doubts about yourself. A slight problem with both films is that, though uneducated, the characters are too smart to have no other options, and while we can accept youngsters getting stuck in this rut, guys in their 30s have some explaining to do about it. As such, the fairy tale ending is a bit depressing—a fact that Smith may recognize, given the *Soul Asylum* song he ends on, “Misery”. You just know that Smith is already thinking about what *Clerks III* will be like ten years from now. On the basis of this, I look forward to it.

av



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