

SCREEN



▲ **RADIOLAND MURDERS** Amy Parrish (left), Bridget Newton and Nina Repeta: cheap trills.

dreams. Keitel and Balk give such rich, deeply felt performances that quibbling about the movie's lapses seems a bit of a crime. (PG) ■ **JOANNE KAUFMAN**

■ **RADIOLAND MURDERS**

Mary Stuart Masterson, Brian Benben

There is a very talented pig (it oinks out a tune) in *Radioland Murders*.

One hopes the porker's agent has a darned good explanation for why he permitted his client to appear in this bottom-of-the-trough comedy-mystery.

The year is 1939, and Chicago radio station WBN is poised to make its nationwide debut. The studio audience is settling in its seats, the orchestra has tuned up, the announcer (Corbin Bernsen) is about to be cued, and everything is chaos. The writers, who haven't been paid in weeks, are planning a mutiny. The dumbbell director can't keep his head, or his toupee, on straight. Station owner Ned Beatty is dumping the whole mess in the lap of his plucky, capable assistant Masterson—who has her own troubles. She's divorcing her head-writer husband (Benben) because of his supposed fling with WBN's resident femme fatale (the late Anita Morris in her final role). And just as things are starting to get utterly out of control, a mysterious voice interrupts the proceedings, setting the scene for one, two, six murders.

The filmmakers seem under the impression that frantic is a synonym for funny. It isn't. (PG) ■ **J.K.**

■ **CLERKS**

Brian O'Halloran, Jeff Anderson

Concept, Level A: It's a low-budget, black-and-white comedy about a twentysomething who works in a New Jersey convenience store. Concept, Level B: It was written and directed by a 23-year-old who actually *worked* at a convenience store. Concept, Level C: It was filmed, in fact, *in the very same store where he was employed*. . . .

Hmmmmmm. If you've had your fill of slump-shouldered, Generation X ennui, the idea of *Clerks* probably has all the appeal of an insufficiently microwaved burrito. On the other hand, if you're a fan of 1991's bumblingly sweet *Slacker*, about a bunch of aimless kids in Austin, Texas, this sounds like manna.

Clerks turns out to be something in between. A burrito with flavor nuggets? A Slurpee with a hint of nectar? Writer-director Kevin Smith has a knack for unexpected, mildly grotesque jokes, and the movie's extraordinarily explicit dialogue is often funny and authentic-sounding. Just as often, though, the banter between O'Halloran and Anderson has the annoyingly snug rhythm of sitcom writing. The acting, no surprise, is amateurish—although Jason Mewes, as a drug dealer who looks like a Red Hot Chili Pepper manqué, is so borderline barbaric, he's in another category altogether. You want to find the rock he crawled out from under to see what else lurks underneath. (R) ■ **TOM GIATTO**

KEITH HANSHIRE

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