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THE GOODS: LIVE HARD, SELL HARD

Assuming his talents haven't waned in the current, sixth season of *Entourage*, Jeremy Piven's bile-spewing Hollywood agent Ari Gold remains (as of season five) as corrosively entertaining as ever, and the Neal Brennan comedy

The Goods: Live Hard, Sell Hard

suggests that Piven's Gold routine could be just as enjoyable on big screens as small ones. It would certainly help, though, if the actor were given a few funny scripts to work with, or at least funnier than this shapeless, scattershot comedy about used-car hucksters trying to unload 211 vehicles over a long Fourth of July weekend.

Beyond the predictably "jokey" affronts to women and gays and people of color, the movie makes one major error in judgment, as the customers here - on the rare occasions when we're witness to an actual *sale* - appear just as moronic as the cloddish dealers. Unlike in 1980's *Used Cars*

, the underrated riot by director Robert Zemeckis, we're given no sense that

The Goods

' salespeople are actually, you know, good

at their jobs, and we're not granted the pleasure of watching innocent buyers being suckered by a smooth or clever pitch; as Brennan's film presents it, patrons hand over their dough simply because they're even stupider than Piven's team. (This isn't, to put it mildly, a very sustaining comedic concept.) There are randomly amusing one-liners and visual throwaways, but more often than not, this patchy and badly photographed outing coasts along on an alternating diet of

When Bad Movies Happen to Good Actors: "The Goods: Live Hard, Sell Hard" and "Post Grad"

Written by Mike Schulz

Sunday, 23 August 2009 16:52

crassness and dopiness, making the half-hearted attempts at sentiment - Will Piven find love? Will James Brolin lose the family business? - feel even more trite than they otherwise might've.

What interest there is in *The Goods* comes solely from its cast. Piven isn't required to do anything he hasn't done before (and better) on HBO, but his fast, aggressive deliveries are still a hoot, and he performs an excellent take on Ted Levine's guttural "

Put the fucking lotion in the basket!!!

" admonishment from

The Silence of the Lambs

. Kathryn Hahn, Ving Rhames, Tony Hale, Ken Jeong, the low-voiced Jordana Spiro, and Alan Thicke (!) are welcome presences, and co-producer Will Ferrell has an agreeably silly cameo as a skydiving (and free-falling) Abraham Lincoln. Plus, not one, not two, but

three

actors from

The Office

show up - David Koechner, Ed Helms, and the omnipresent Craig Robinson - and each one scores a chuckle or two. I used to think it was an unwritten law that every new film comedy feature at least one co-star from that great NBC sitcom, but after

The Goods

and B.J. Novak's appearance as one of the

Inglourious Basterds

, I'm starting to think that law actually

is

written somewhere.



POST GRAD

As if we needed further proof that there are more talents in Hollywood than Hollywood knows what to do with, the supporting cast for director Vicky Jensen's *Post Grad* features an almost alarming assemblage of gifted actors: Michael Keaton, Jane Lynch, J.K. Simmons, and even Carol freakin' Burnett. And the movie

still

sucks. This aching formulaic, insufferably cutesy comedy finds a recent graduate (Alexis

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Bledel) finding it tough to land a job after college, and having to move back home with her folks, and having to choose between her pining best friend (Zach Gilford, great on *Friday Light Lights*, kinda sweet here) and the smoldering Brazilian across the street (Rodrigo Santoro), and blah blah blah. It's all just as wispy and inane and forgettable as you'd imagine, with the added "bonus" of its message, which tells young women that it's okay to ditch your long-term career goals if there's a sad-eyed hottie waiting in the wings.

Even the usually charming Bledel seems defeated by her retrograde material - the actress' impossibly blue eyes, here, are a good deal more magnetic than their owner - and so your only reprieve from the tiresome whimsy comes from the winning eccentricity of on-screen parents Keaton and Lynch, and from Burnett, who is, as always, impervious to calamity. Even given worthless material, the comedienne is so unfailingly witty that she can earn a cackle from the mere act of putting down a glass, and her reaction to a funeral director's awkward sales pitch - "What do I have to do to get you in one of my caskets?" - is a miniature piece of deadpan perfection. The actor playing the funeral director, by the way? *The Office's* Craig Robinson. Do your best to control your shock.

For a review of *Inglourious Basterds*, see "[Basterd People](#)."