Burleigh Smith is as humble playing the quirky lead in an indie rom-com as he is when discussing his Garden State Screenwriting Competition win with Dave Drayton.

"It was a nice acknowledgement," Smith reflects of the accolade recently awarded to his script, You Can’t Play The Game If You Don’t Know The Rules? “I enjoy entering screenplay competitions and film festivals. I’m always curious to see how my work will be received in other countries.”

The response is somewhat humble and incredibly understated for Smith, the two-time Tropfest finalist, who, despite having had his short films accepted into more than 200 festivals worldwide, makes out like it could be some kind of hobby. Far from it, the drive that’s led to this most recent win reveals a commitment to craft as well as prolificacy. “I know many screenwriters who spend years torturing themselves, writing draft after draft, and losing interest in the material in the process. I have a very short attention span and the patience of a child. I’d hate to be still working on something I started many years before. I’d just lose interest.”

That short attention span also means Smith – a man versed also in acting and directing – couldn’t confine himself to just the writerly credit, himself playing one half of the perfect couple that may never meet each other as a dull academic named Anders, opposite Andrea, played by Zoe Ventoura (Packed To The Rafters), an HR officer who gets involved with an older gentleman. The cast also includes Offspring’s John Waters, and Tiriel Mora, perhaps most famously from The Castle.

The mouthful of a title suggests a complicated amalgam of self-help books and guides to picking up, and comes from one such book (the more respectable former) by Dr Irene
Alexander. With Dr Alexander’s blessing, chapter titles from her self-help book are incorporated into the film. “Irene’s book appealed to me first because of the title. I had the idea for my story but was seeking a distinct title and sure found one. I came across the book in a store in Perth last year and thought it would be interesting to incorporate a relationships guide.”

Considering his rapid rate of creating laughably rueful romance it’s unsurprising to hear who’s inspired Smith’s work ethic. “Woody Allen works in a similar way. I love that he’s been so prolific and I find it very inspiring. I find the rom-com easy to write and have been working in this genre for many years now. Perhaps because my own relationships have been such a joke, I’m never short of material.” True to his word, as the edits come together for You Can’t Play The Game..., he’s already at work on a feature for 2015. “I’m looking at exploring darker territory with my next screenplay, though I’m wary of straying from a genre that has served me well in the past.” As part of the top prize, You Can’t Play The Game... was given a live reading on stage with three-time Academy Award nominee Diane Ladd directing in Atlantic City earlier this month.

Burleigh Smith is the Senior Film Lecturer at SAE Institute Perth. For more info on SAE head to: [http://sae.edu.au/](http://sae.edu.au/)

Dave Drayton