

Dogma: it ain't your mother's religion

by Deanna Symoski
features editor

I have a theory you business majors might find interesting: instead of asking your future advertising department to create ninety-second promos on a topic to which no one is currently paying any attention, encourage upper management to do something gutsy, something ballsy, something the average God-fearing American would find utterly outrageous, and let the media sell your product for you. It's called controversy, people, and it just made Kevin Smith a household name.

I went to see *Dogma* for two reasons. No, not Ben Affleck and Matt Damon. Well, okay, Matt Damon was one, but the other more substantial reason was the hype. Any movie that can prompt a resistance league to harness the media like a bucking bronco had to have something interesting to say. And while I won't preach any take-home messages, *Dogma* makes an intelligent and entertaining attempt at restoring honest faith in the midst of a pre-millennium blitz of fanatical evangelism.

It goes like this: rebellious angels, Loki and Bartleby (Damon and Affleck, respectively) were bounced out of Heaven quite some years ago because Bartleby convinces his buddy, who also happens to be the Angel of Death, that killing, even in God's name, is not right. The pair presents God with their conundrum, but for their insubordination, they are banished for eternity to Wisconsin. We meet up with the mischievous angels in a Wisconsin airport just as Loki is convincing a nun that there is no God...just for kicks.

Meanwhile, the Catholic church has decided they need a new, more

user-friendly approach to recruitment, so a New Jersey Cardinal, played by George Carlin (you can double check, but I think this is the exact definition of irony), revamps the religion by launching "Catholicism Wow!"—the movement responsible for, among other things, exchanging the crucifix for the

reentrance of Loki and Bartleby would wipe out existence forever. It is up to Bethany (Linda Fiorentino), an abortion clinic employee who's lost her faith, to save all of mankind and keep the angels from getting home. (This, I believe, is the second definition of irony.)

faith—than a Billy Graham marathon. Yes, it questions everything from Christ's last thoughts to the gender of God, but these aren't attacks. They are the fuel that causes us to defend what we believe, whatever we believe, and come out stronger for it. They also serve as commentary, not so much about

ing serious moments with the compassion they deserve, yet has the good sense not to play solely on our emotions. We like the characters first because they entertain us, and for that, we allow them to touch us.

And the characters, too, are ingenious. What I initially thought

Kevin Smith film; and Alanis Morissette. I won't tell you who she plays because I wouldn't want to rob the person in the seat next to you of the expression on your face when you find out.

Together, all these elements creatively turn out a film that is actually worth the cost of a movie ticket

Crumbling in the face of controversy

by Deanna Symoski
features editor

What if Congress passed a law that ensured that everyone was just like you? Everyone thought like you, looked like you and believed what you believe. Would this make you happy? Would this be your Utopia? If you were part of the Catholic League of Religious and Civil Rights, it might be.

At least that's the message I got after reading an article in *USA Today* recently, which explained the new protesting strategy of the league, which is basically to descend on the media with reckless abandon. What, you might ask, could cause such a fuss? Y2K? War? Famine? Nuclear destruction? Nope. It's a movie, of course.

Dogma, the new Kevin Smith film, was aware of its controversial subject matter from the beginning. Don't, for a second, think that the

creators of this film were ignorant to the consequences of putting it out, but for "Buddy Christ's" sake, at least they had the balls to do it. Which is more than Smith can say for Disney.

See, originally *Dogma* belonged to Miramax films, which is a subsidiary of the Disney Corporation. In April, Bob and Harvey Weinstein (cofounders of Miramax), apparently nervous that Disney might shelf the movie because of inevitable protest, bought the film personally and eventually released it through Lions Gate Pictures. The problem as Smith sees it is simply this: "Disney positions itself as family-oriented. Disney is everywhere and you can definitely strike at them by boycotting the theme parks or cancelling subscriptions to the Disney Channel."

Josh Chetwynd, *USA Today* reporter, goes on to say that "Other studios are in similar situations. Because they are parts of huge conglomerates that have broader inter-

ests to protect, most studios have become skittish about controversial films." So does this mean that we are condemned to historically inaccurate animation flicks? Not exactly.

There is a saving grace in Hollywood called the independent studio. They are the ones who have not been merged with larger corporations and have the freedom to release just about anything they choose because, fortunately for us, they don't have restaurants and theme parks to think about. They have the luxury, and, it seems, the emerging duty, of remaining faithful to the artistry of filmmaking. They understand that the best movie isn't necessarily the one that every special interests group in the country approves of. And they don't care.

After all, what would this country be like in that Utopia of oneness? No debates, no questions, only the weak-minded followers of one doctrine. Films like *Dogma* that are ripe with controversy are the meat of conver-

sation. We form opinions based on these conversations because rarely do we know what we think until we see what we say. If every film conformed to a regimen of docile sugarcoating, what good would films be? Unlike most other forms of the media, film has the amazing capacity to inspire, outrage and touch us. That film companies like Disney would have the audacity to take that away from us is appalling. If you're so afraid to make movies, guys, get out of the business. Mickey's making you enough money without you having to jeopardize the whole industry.

And I question the very logic of the Catholic League itself. They protest *Dogma* which humorously reaffirms faith, yet *Chasing Amy* is okay. I get it. Gratuitous explanations of lesbian sex are permissible, but the moment Kevin Smith makes a movie with actual substance, you protest. What is this supposed to do for the quality of future films? ("Hey all you talented

young directors out there, keep peddling stupid frivolity, the studios won't let us release anything substantial because they might catch some heat." So what!)

If no one ever crossed a line, we would never know what was on the other side of it. We would never grow, we would scarcely think, and we would die having never understood what we really thought about anything. This is not my Utopia. Thankfully, this is not even real life. But it could be someday if the money-hungry suits in the movie business don't get their acts together. The media and the power to be heard are gifts, ladies and gentlemen, so grow some moxy and give the average movie-goer a film that's worth their while. Stand up in the face of protest, because I gotta tell ya', you'll be losing your bottom line to the indies if you do. And even Mickey couldn't save you then.

"Buddy Christ," a six-foot icon that winks and gives the thumbs-up.

But with the new doctrine, a loophole opens up for the angels to get back into Heaven, thereby disproving the infallibility of God. And since life as we know it just happens to be based on this one truth,

I won't reveal any more about the plot simply because it is so involved that giving it away some would require giving away all of it, and this film is too enjoyable to watch to have the fun spoiled here. Rather, I'll tell you that *Dogma* does more to reaffirm faith—any

religion, but of the catastrophe we have made out of it.

Director Kevin Smith has scripted a brilliant comedy, ripe with the humor of *Mallrats* and the heart of, well, I don't think we've ever seen Kevin Smith's heart until now. He has a knack for treat-

would be a messy play for screen time, turns out to be a well-balanced ensemble cast. There is Selma Hayak as Muse; Chris Rock as Rufus, the thirteenth Apostle who says he was omitted from the Bible because he's black; Jay and Silent Bob who are a staple of any

these days, and there are few movies lately that are worth that. *Dogma* is a film that makes us think about, question and defend our beliefs, all the while engaging us in sharp witticism. Thinking, laughing and Matt Damon? The Oscar race has officially begun!!

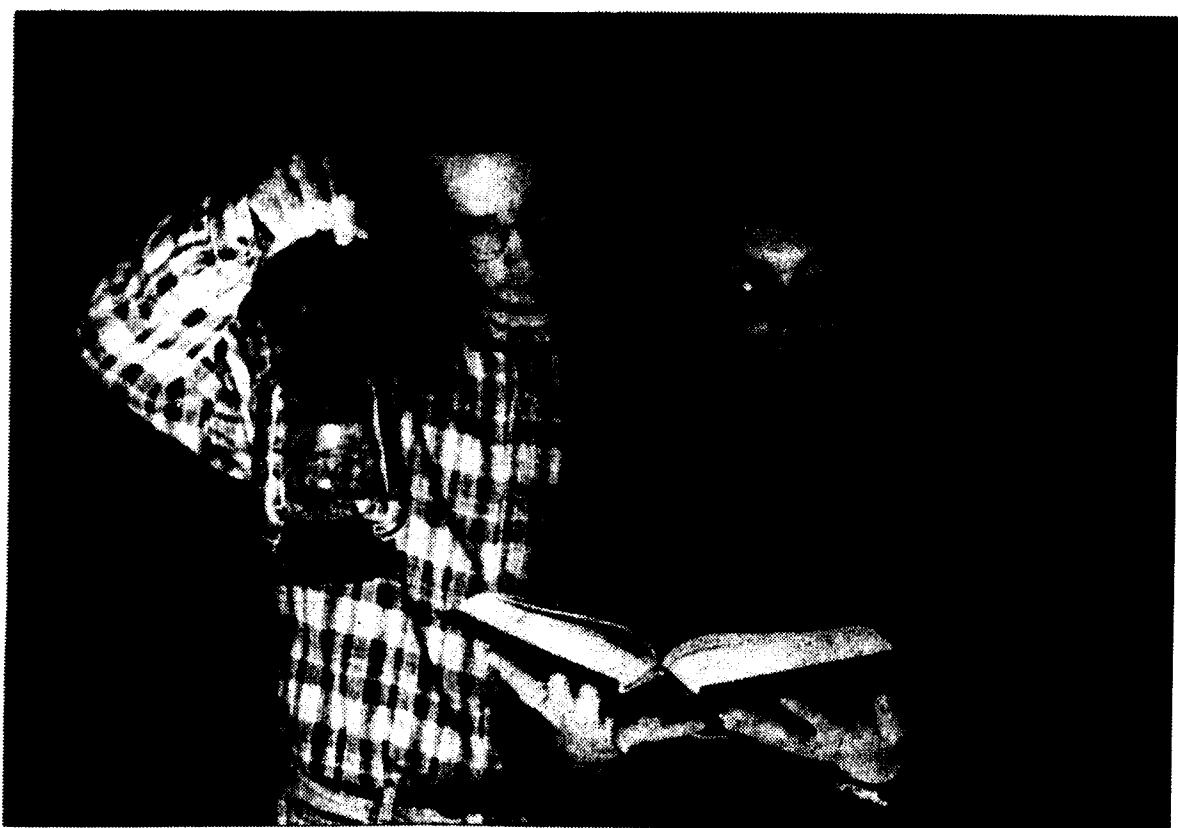


photo courtesy of the Studio Theatre

The Studio Theatre at Penn State Behrend presents *Teibele and Her Demon*, a play by Isaac Bashevis Singer. Three performances still remain on November 19 and 20 at 8 p.m., and at 2:30 p.m. on November 21. For tickets, call the box office at 898-6016. Above, Beadle Leib, played by freshman Rob Kearns, assists the Rabbi, played by junior Matt Parson. Don't miss this tale of dark mystery and passion now playing at the Studio Theatre.

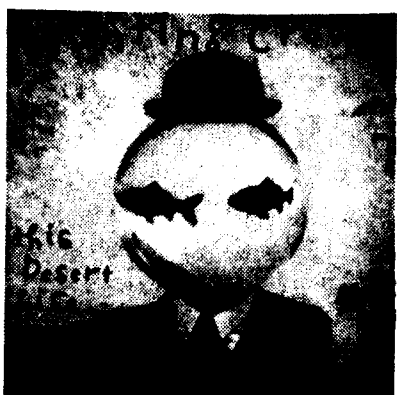
Hangin' Around with *This Desert Life*

by Michael Frawley
managing editor

Well, all of you Counting Crows fans out there can breathe a collective sigh of relief. After waiting for three years they have offered up their newest album, *This Desert Life*. And trust me, you won't be disappointed by what you hear.

Adam Duritz, the brilliant lead singer of the group, took this album in a new direction. *This Desert Life* is much less heavy-handed than either of their other releases, *August and Everything After* (1993) and *Recovering the Satellites* (1996). In these first two recordings, Adam showed himself to be a very deep and brooding person concerned about his new-found fame and what the future held for him. *This Desert Life*, while not a happy-go-lucky album, showed the band having a good time recording this one. Duritz said, "I don't sit around moping all day long." And this album goes a long way to prove it. The first single off of *This Desert Life*

was "Hangin' Around." The video for this song was filmed in the living room of the house in Hollywood where the entire album was recorded. This upbeat offering has to be considered one of



Counting Crows' greatest songs. This kick off to the new album sets the stage for the rest of the album. Duritz says, "I've been bummin' around this town for way too long." As *This Desert Life* is Duritz's venture into a new part of his life.

Many people consider Counting Crows to be too dark and depressing, but all of their songs carry a deeper meaning that many people can get something out of. And while there is a more upbeat sound to *This Desert Life*, it still has its traditional Counting Crows quota of Duritz's depressed view on life.

The Crows have just started to tour to promote this record. This tour, called *This Desert Life - The Millennium Tour*, will be playing various cities in the area through the end of November, such as the Cleveland Music Hall on November 21. And for those of you who have never attended a Counting Crows concert, it is an experience that you really should take advantage of. Adam Duritz has such a stage presence that you feel like a part of the band.

This Desert Life is an album that is well worth your time to listen to, which almost anyone will be able to find something in it to identify with.

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