## 'Dogma' takes cynical, comic look at religion

Carl Reiner's "Oh God" (1977) gave us George Burns and a Borscht Belt take on the Old Tes-tament. In Kevin Smith's pro-found and profane comedy-fanta-sy "Dogma," the Lord is angat singer Alania Morisette. If you

singer Alanis Morisotte. If you can accept that, the reat of the often clever, quite pro-faith plot may make perfect sense.

Loki (Matt Damon) and Bartleby (Ben Affleck) are fallen angels of death. Expelled from Heaven, they've been commanded to live in Wisconsin for the length of human existence. This is some cruel God we're talking about here.

The two discover a loophole that will allow them back into Paradise if they can pass through the archway of a newly rededicated church in New Jersey, But for two fallen angels, to return home would prove an infallible God to be fallible; this would negate overything and everyone—starting, we assume, with New Jersey.

To prevent Armageddon, the Voice of God (Alan Rickman) is dispatched to enlist the aid of a human to save all humankind. They choose an abortion clinic volunteer, Bethany is—stand back, now—the great, great, great (repeat a few dozen times) ... niece of

Jesus. It seems that Mary and Joseph did a bit of begetting of their own.

And there's more, lots more. The 13th apostle, for example. He's an angry young man named Rufus (Chris Rock), who literally falls from the sky to help out. Did he really know Jesus, saks Bethany. "Knew him? He owes me 12 bucks." Apparently they listen to "2000 Year Old Man" albums up there, as Rufus rips off old Mel Brooks punchlines with no remoras. And why haven't we heard of him? "I was left out because I'm black." Just what we need, an apostle with an attitude.

"Dogma" takes on a lot, and spends a lot of screen time



Comedy-Fantasy: Matt Damon and Ben Affleck in a scene from director Kevin Smith's latest effort "Dogma.

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explaining Catholic doctrines such as plenary indulgence, which is an eternal amnesty of sorts. At the heart of the film, however, is writer/director Smith's assertions that an idea is better than a belief and it doesn't matter what you have faith in as long as you have

faith.

For all its controversy, planned or not, "Dogma" is as pro-Bible as it is anti-organized religion.

There is a real "Wizard of Oz" sweetness there if you dig far

Butch and Sundance routine as well as any contemporary duo could; Rickman and Rock are each hilarious in delivering their very different types of humor. George Carlin as a cardinal is great casting, as it was Carlin's original comedy monologues on his parochial school upbringing

enough below the sophomoric language and "Lost in Space" effects (a demon from the bowels of the earth is a poop-monster that emerges from a tollet).

Affleck and Damon do the Butch and Sundance routine as well as any contemporary duo could; Rickmen and Rock are ab histories in additional to the count time in his films ("Mall Rats," "Clerks" and "Chastall Rats," "Clerks" and "Clerks" "Clerks" "Clerks" "

Silent Bob. Many of those who flock to this film may find Jay's unceasing

foul mouth funny.

It may or may not be a sin, but it has long ago stopped being

## **COMING ATTRACTIONS**

Scheduled to open Wednesday, Nov. 24

\*FLMMES\*
Comedic drama of a retired security
guerd who suffers a stroke and is
assigned to a rotab program which
includes singing lessons with his
neighbor, a frag queen. Stars Robert
De Niro and Philip Seymour Hoffman.

"TRAIN OF LIPE"
Set in a small European town, a village dreamer aims to save his town from Nazi Invasion. Stars Lionel Abelanski, Rufus, Clement Harari and Michel Müller.

"TOY STORY 2"

el to the 1995 animated comedy, Buzz Lightyear and fellow toys must save their pal, Woody from becoming a museum piece. Stars the voices of Tom Hanks, Tim Allen, Don Ricklas and Jim Varney.

\*\*\* Set at the down of the new millenni-um, this thriller follows Satan's visit to New York City in search of a bride with whom he hopes to rule the next thou-send years. Stars Arnold Schwerzeneg.

ger, Gabriel Byrne, Robin Tunney and Kevin Pollack.

Scheduled to open Friday, Dec. 10 "THE GREEN MILE"
Remarkable story of a guard in a
Southern prison's death row in 1935 and one of the inmutes over which he has charge. Based on the 1996 serial-ized novel by Stephen King. Stars Tom

"ANNA AND THE KING"

Set in 19th century Thelland, the true story of the relationship between a British schoolteacher and the King of Slam. Based on historical information.

\*CIOES HOUSE BULES\* "CEDER HOUSE RULES"
Classic story of a young man's extraordinary journey; leaving home, finding 
love and finding his place in the world. 
Based on the best-selling novel by 
John Irving. Stars Tobey Maguire.

Scheduled to open Wednesday, Dec. 22 Drama about a an aging star quarter-back who is induced to play burt

because a gifted and unprincipled young tolent is seeking to replace him. The coach who struggles to remain true to the ideast that drew him to his career, and the ambitious young owner of the team. Stars Al Pacino, Dennis Quald.

Scheduled to open Saturday, Dec. 25

Scheduled to open Saturday, Dec. 25

"LIBERTY MIGHTS"

A dramatic look at the life and times
of a Battimore family in the mid 1950s
which focuses on Issues of religion, roce and class distinction written and
directed by Barry Levinson, Stora
Adrien Brody, Bebe Nouwirth and Joe
Mantegna

"MANSFIELD PARK"
Based on the book by Jane Austin, the story of a young woman from a poor family, sent to live with her wealthy cousins at their estate. The plan is to arrange a marriage that will assure her place in society, but her high spirited nature and ideas about love will make it a difficult proposition. Stars Frances O'Connor and Jonny Lee Miller.

## Film lacks believability, focus

By JON KATZ SPECIAL WRITES

Some husbands put their wives on a pedestal. French filmmaker Luc Besson put his (model/actress Milla Jovovich) (model/actress Milla Jovovich) on the big screen with thou-sands of extras. A few husbands may think of their wives as a saint. Besson's was cast as one. And then, to believe the tabloids, she left him. Frankly, their off-screen lives may prove more exciting than this latest retelling of Joan of Arc.

may prove more exciting than this latest retelling of Joan of Arefore the details, one warning is in order. The Messenger is not the film to take your catchism student to. Ho or she will learn about Joan, all right, but also about the language the English used to describe her. It is very plain English, not how we thought they talked in the pristine 16th century. A groaning audience seemed to agree.

If you're still interested, The Messenger is an ambitious effort that is visually attractive and graphically detailed. Young peasant girl Joan witnesses her tiny French village overrun and her older sister raped and murdered during the bloody Hundred Years' War. A deciding factor in the war was who would control the city of Orleans. Only one thing could save France ... a miracle.

Soon after, Joan hears voices

miracle.
Soon after, Joan hears voices from the sky and has strange visions. She is, she is told, the chosen one who will restore France and give aid to the Dauphin Charles so that he might be crowned king. To do



in battle: Milla Jovovich is Joan of Arc in "The ger: The Story of Joan of Arc" in theaters

now.

so, she must wear men's cloth-ing, bear arms and lead an

so, she must wear men's clothing, bear arms and lead an army.

Joan convinces Charles (a prissy John Malkovich) and his mother-in-law (Faye Dunaway) of her divinely blessed mission, and indeed wins a series of battles before being betrayed by her own people and burned at the stake as a heretic in 1431.

Besson (The Fifth Element') presents Joan as a pertified kid, shivering and stammering things like, 'I am the drum on which God is beating out his message. 'She is quick to lose her temper, foolish in battle and lacks confidence. Now all this might well have been true, but something told those soldiers to follow her; the viewer is just not as convinced as they were.

Jovovich in armor is out of her element. As an actress, she's a terrific model. And what's the deal with her hair color? She's a sunny blond to begin with. Somewhere in the middle, after cutting her long

locks, she's a redhead. She tells the English troops lined up against her outnumbered forces, "I have a message for your King Henry from God go home!" Well sorry, but she looks like Opic telling the school bully that his father's the sheriff Finally, at the burning, she's plainly a brunette.

The battle scenes are well staged, albeit quite graphic (a head is severed, limbs are sent-tered about), but the troops and their uniforms all look alike. At least you could tell Spartacus from the Romans.

Where "The Messenger" is meaningful is in Joan's prison seenss, where she is confronted by her conscience (a hooded and bearded Dustin Hoffman). Only here is Joan's uncertainty believable, but the fact that her conscience is so much smarter than she is becomes confusing. At one point she says "Get thee behind me, Satan," which only adds to the muddle that is "The Messenger."