

CINEMA

Review:

The Gods Must Be Crazy

Imagine a *National Geographic* TV special on the "little people" of the African Kalahari Desert. You know. Wildlife, ecological witticisms, plummy-voiced household hints on extracting water from plants, with wide-angle shots of the tribespeople against the setting sun intercut with speeded-up shots of "civilization," traffic jams, roaring jets, clanking assembly lines. Add a plot about a sacred Coke bottle and a hopeless klutz of a romantic hero with slapstick routines straight out of "The Three Stooges." Mix in a group of angry pickets outside the theater and you know we are not talking "Dynasty." It's *The Gods Must Be Crazy* currently playing at the Bijou.

Produced, written, directed, and edited by Jamie Uys, who likes to save money on help, *The Gods* starts with a view of the Bushman tribe of the Kalihari. One of the most isolated people in the world, we are told they live in such harmony that they have no concept of private property. When they kill an animal, they apologize, explaining to its spirit they only kill because they must eat.

When a passing airplane tosses a Coke bottle into the Kalahari, it's a gift from the Gods. A hammer, a water carrier, a musical instrument, the bottle teaches the tribe to fight for a possession. Troubled by the increasing violence, the leader of the band, Xi, declares the bottle an "evil thing." Since he can't send it back into the sky, he starts walking to the end of the earth to return it.

Meanwhile (and this picture has more meanwhiles than the Pentagon has angles), Andrew Steyn, klutzy biologist, has come to the wilderness to research elephant droppings. Enter Kate Thompson, charming ex-reporter, getting away from it all by moving in to teach school just a few hippo tracks down the way. There's love at first sight, but being romanced by the accident-prone Steyn is hazardous to the health. Kate prefers smoothy Jack Hind, a white hunter who "safari's" in a bus complete with refrigerator and bar. Now Xi wanders in with his "evil thing," and is jailed for killing a goat even though he politely offers to share his catch. Knowing he would die in prison, Steyn springs Xi by hiring him as an assistant.

Suddenly Kate and her entire school class are taken hostage by a gang of Keystone Kop revolutionaries/terrorists/Bandits or all of the above. The baddies don't have a prayer when Steyn (with Xi's help) goes out to save his woman. Tarzan, eat your heart out.

There's great stuff here. For one, Xi's farcical trial is a gentle lesson in intercultural non-communication. For another, against all odds, much of the slapstick works. Steyn's (Marius Weyers) strained, super-serious efforts to block the wheels of a brakeless jeep or to impress Kate with a bit of macho are great fun. On the other hand, Director Uys sometimes stoops to silliness, speeding up the film or even reversing it, tricks which would embarrass Jerry Lewis.



Xi journeys to the edge of the world to return a gift from the gods, in *The Gods Must Be Crazy*.

Far worse than any camera tricks, according to the Eugene Anti-Apartheid Coalition, is that the movie was made by a South African. They picketed the theatre, waving signs and chanting, "Racist, racist, you can't hide/ No more products/ For apartheid." For a sixties sentimentalist who gets misty eyed at a chorus of "We Shall Overcome," it was like old times.

"What we are objecting to is that the movie is a South African product," says Sharon Claeysens, spokesperson for the Coalition. "This is part of an ongoing effort to identify South African products in our community." Claeysens stresses part of the money made by the film will go to South Africa. Hurting the economy to help the poor may seem a little like bombing the prison to save the hostages, but Claeysens says that "the people there want us to move foreign money from the economy. Foreign money is holding up that economy."

For Claeysens, political considerations come first, but she also is less than impressed with a description of the plot line. "In what way does this movie challenge the racial status quo? What way does it challenge notions of white

supremacy? The black guy sees the white people and assumes they're gods."

Politically, this movie challenges nothing; probably Jamie Uys would be behind bars if it did. Any message here is not political; it's religious. We live in times of religious extremism. Moslems battle Moslems even in holy Mecca; Belfast is a battlefield; here, the so-called "Army of God" bombs women's clinics. Personally, I love the story of Xi, this tiny, friendly, but proud man carrying his Coke bottle to the end of the world to inform the Gods humbly that, with all due respect and gratitude for their favor, if they think their sacred gift is worth dissension and violence, they must be out of their minds.

—Kent Patterson

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NOW SHOWING

Amadeus: Mozart's music becomes a character in this lavishly filmed story of the playfully brazen child-man Mozart (Tom Hulce) and his mediocre musical rival Antonio Salieri (F. Murray Abraham). Cinema World (342-6536).

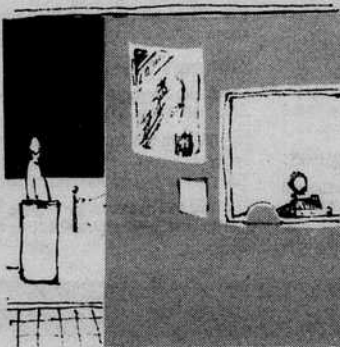
Beverly Hills Cop: Eddie Murphy is a Detroit cop who comes to Beverly Hills to solve the murder of his best friend. Directed by Martin Brest (*Going in Style*). Mayflower (345-1022) and Springfield Quad (726-9073).

The Breakfast Club: Five high school students meet in the morning to spend the day in detention together and the antics of "The Breakfast Club" begin. John Hughes directs. Stars Molly Ringwald and Anthony Michael Hall (*Sixteen Candles*), Emilio Estevez (*The Outsiders*, *Reno Man*), Ally Sheedy (*War Games*) and Rick Moranis (*Ghostbusters*) as the janitor. National (344-3431) and Springfield Quad (726-9073).

The Go Masters: This epic is the first co-production between China and Japan. The subject is family separation and reconciliation, set in the rivalrous period of 1924-1956 in China and Japan. Cinema 7 (687-0733).

The Gods Must Be Crazy: Everyone knows that if a thing falls from the sky, it must be sent from the gods. This film has nothing to do with apartheid. A pilot flying an airplane over the Kalahari desert drops a coke bottle out the window which is found by Xi, a South African bushman. The significance attributed to the bottle is in direct proportion to its imagined source of origin. This delightful and funny story, playing to sell-out crowds in Seattle and San Francisco, was written and directed by Jamie Uys. Bijou (686-2458).

Into the Night: Comic thriller. Jeff Goldblum is an insomniac aerospace engineer who roams the streets of L.A. on sleepless nights and gets entangled with a woman (Michelle Pfeiffer, *Scarface*) and underworld characters. Remember Goldblum as the funny hip journalist in *The Big Chill*? The brain surgeon in *Buckaroo Bonzai*? The NASA recruiter in *The Right Stuff*? This is his first lead role. Directed by John Landis. West 11th Tri Cinema (342-4142).



The Killing Fields: This British film shows the transformation of Cambodia into a concentration camp after the American evacuation from Saigon. The true story of N.Y. Times correspondent Sydney Schanberg (Sam Waterston) and his Cambodian interpreter-friend Dith Pran (Haing S. Ngor). The men were separated and the journalist spent years trying to find Pran, who had been interred in the camps of the Khmer Rouge—the Killing Fields. British stage director Roland Joffe makes his film directorial debut. McDonald (344-4343).

Micki & Maude: Dudley Moore's wife (Ann Reinking of *All That Jazz*) is a hot-shot lawyer who won't let pregnancy interfere with her career. His girlfriend (Amy Irving, *Yentl*) gets pregnant, he marries her planning to divorce his wife, who, surprise!—is getting a visit from the stork. Blake "10" Edwards directs this good idea which could have been a good movie. Shows with *Protocol* at the Fine Arts (747-2201).

Missing in Action: Action war film. Chuck Norris works toward the release of POW's missing in action from Vietnam. Springfield Quad (726-9073).

Missing in Action, Part II: Another action war film, the story behind *Missing in Action* part I. West 11th Tri Cinema (342-4142).

Monarch of the Mountains: A nature film (G-rated) showing animals in their natural habitats, narrated by Slim Pickens. Valley River Twin (686-8633).

1984: Richard Burton's last role. He and John Hurt are the protagonists of George Orwell's alarming futuristic phantasm. This is a literal adaptation of the book which prophesied government control of the individual by audio, visual, electronic information gathering and storage devices. What a wild idea! Directed by Michael Radford. Music by Eurythmics. Valley River Twin (686-8633).

A Passage to India: Set in a richly colored, politically fragile British Colonial India (1926), the story is an impassioned treatment of racially forbidden loves—one a deep and honorable friendship between two men, Indian Dr. Aziz and British schoolmaster Fielding (Victor Banerjee and James Fox); the other a forbidden yet uncontrollable connection between the vibrant Dr. Aziz and the beautiful Adele Quested (Judy Davis, *My Brilliant Career*). Maurice Jarre's music is a formidable character in this piece. West 11th Tri Cinema (342-4142).

Protocol: Goldie Hawn seduces a Middle Eastern potentate and persuades him to permit placement of an American military base in his country. Directed by Herbert Ross (*Footloose*). Script by Buck Henry (*First Family*). Shows with *Micki & Maude* at the Fine Arts (747-2201).

Revenge of the Nerds: If your nose was too big in high school (or too small), you know what it's like to be an outcast. All the "uncool" underdogs who can't get into the primo fraternities form their own fraternity and get even. Bijou Late Nite (686-2458).

The Sure Thing: Romantic comedy. A guy is hitchhiking to California to see his girlfriend and falls in love with his fellow hitchhiker—a girl hitchhiking to California to see her boyfriend. Cinema World (342-6536).

2010: More in the nature of *Star Trek* than 2001, a well-done comic book film story. While Russia and the U.S. prepare to fight a war over a crisis in Honduras, a Russian craft with a Russian-American crew sets out to explore the circles of Jupiter. Directed by Peter Hyams. Oakway (342-5351).

Vision Quest: Romantic Comedy. A teenager is trying to win a wrestling scholarship to college and a girl disturbs his concentration. Cinema World (342-6536).

Witness: An American detective-love story from the Australian master of subliminal tension, Peter Weir (*Picnic at Hanging Rock*, *The Last Wave*, *Gallipoli*, *The Year of Living Dangerously*). Cultures clash as a 20th century police department meets 17th century agrarian-religious culture. Lukas Haas (*Testament*) is a young Amish boy who witnesses a murder. Investigating detective Harrison Ford (*Raiders*, *Indiana Jones*, *Star Wars*) discovers that police colleagues are involved in the murder, and hides out with the boy and his mother (Kelly McGillis, *Reuben, Reuben*) in Pennsylvania Amish Country, while a plan is devised. Cinema World (342-6536).

—S.R.

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"A WONDERFULLY FUNNY AND WISTFUL ADVENTURE..." begins when a coke bottle falls into an idyllic tribe of Kalahari bushmen and causes strife. When Xi, their gentle chief, decides to take the evil object to the end of the earth and throw it off, he runs headlong into a herd of "civilized" people, including a bumbling microbiologist, an idealistic school teacher and a band of card-playing communist revolutionaries. It's a glorious blend of slapstick humor, romance, sly political commentary, and astute anthropology. —S.F. Chronicle

"SO YOU'RE SICK OF HOLLYWOOD MOVIES..." take your friends, your kids, it's that good, that funny, that sexy, that crazy and yes, that touching. Peter Stack, S.F. Chronicle

"A REFRESHINGLY LOOPY MOVIE!" Kathleen Carroll, NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

"A COMEDY ABOUT THE CLASH OF CULTURES... EVEN FUNNIER THAN IT IS ECCENTRIC WHICH IS SAYING QUITE A LOT." Janet Maslin, NEW YORK TIMES

THE GODS MUST BE CRAZY

An Epic Comedy... Of Aburd Proportions

In English, suitable for children PG

This film was made by an independent production company (based in South Africa) whose only sin is working in a country ruled by an authoritarian regime that most of us find very repugnant. Jamie Uys, the producer/director/writer is in NO WAY PRO-APARTHEID. The film was made as tribute to the Kalahari peoples. If you choose to deny yourself the experience of this unique motion picture, it's your loss. But don't pretend that by doing so you are in any way fighting Apartheid.

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