



Jason Mewes and Kevin Smith,  
AKA Jay & Silent Bob.

PHOTO COURTESY OF KEVIN SMITH

# They're *baack!*

Cult filmmaker Kevin Smith talks about being a slacker-done-good and his latest animated film, "Jay & Silent Bob's Super Groovy Cartoon Movie"

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"Who knew, dude?" exclaims director Kevin Smith, as he talks about the small cameo role he gave himself in his 1994 debut feature "Clerks." "I had no idea I was punching my ticket for the next 20 years." Silent Bob, the mute character he is most recognisable for, has gone on to become one half of View Askewniverse, the fictional universe created and used in most of his films since.

"People call out at me in the street: 'Silent Bob!' That was a happy little accident where I just thought, if we're going to do this, I at least want to be in the thing."

In the two decades since, Smith has built up a large and impressive body of work, a cult following and made many more cameo appearances alongside his old friend and sidekick Jason Mewes as Jay.

The last big screen live action film they appeared in was "Clerks II" in 2006, but this week both Smith and Mewes (live) and Bob

and Jay (in animated form) are out on tour, bringing the Jay & Silent Bob Get Old podcast to the live arena as well as a screening of an animated adventure, Jay & Silent Bob's Super Groovy Cartoon Movie.

The podcast, ordinarily filmed in front of a live audience in the States, started with Mewes, the now 40-year-old actor, talking about his former drug addiction and sexual adventures. It's a dark topic but Jay and Bob (who isn't silent in this instance) are skilled and hilarious in their storytelling, and it works as comic therapy for Mewes, who has now been sober four years.

In the podcast's infancy, however, Mewes hadn't had much experience of public speaking.

"I used to be scared to sit next to him because you never knew what was coming out of his mouth," Smith recalls. "Now he's a veritable raconteur, there are times where he'll take over the show. He knows how to craft a story and work physicality into it. It's a joy to watch. Sometimes I'm just sitting

and enjoying the show that he's doing."

The double act's true-life story starts back in the New Jersey Quick Stop convenience store where Smith, then in his early twenties, was working. Already nursing a love for comic books, film and writing it was there he met Vincent Pereira who he later worked with.

"He was the guy who would mop up at night and he was the first person I ever met who said: 'I want to be a director.' I thought directors were born in Hollywood."

Smith decided to give it a go himself, gathering a group of friends and amateur actors together and staying up all night to film using his work premises as a set. The result was Clerks, a day in the life of Dante and Randal, two young shop workers who banter and philosophise about life and spout refreshingly frank talk about sex all within a sharp and witty script - a cult classic. The characters' friends and customers drop in and out - one of them played by Mewes, then in his teens.

"I knew Jason was funny and I wanted to put him into the movie. I wrote it pretty much as Jason was at 16 years old. I wanted to put somebody next to him so he wasn't talking to himself and they didn't even have to say a word because Jay was a motormouth, so I called that character Silent Bob."

Originally Smith intended to play Randal - "which is why Randal has all the best jokes" - but after casting Jeff Anderson in the role, Smith decided to be Silent Bob.

"I'll stand next to Jay and that way I can direct him within the scene and I don't have to memorise any dialogue."

To Smith's surprise "Clerks" received critical acclaim and was soon picked up and distributed by Miramax. He maintains that it was simply the result of a lot of hard work and the determination to see a project through.

"I've been telling people for 20 years now: there's no difference between me on stage and you in the audience except that I tried. You can't sit there and wonder: 'How come the world's not coming to me finding my brilliance?' They can't know that unless you show them what you can do. When I saw Richard Linklater's film Slacker, I was like: 'Well, here's a guy in Texas who's just doing it. He's not waiting for permission. He just made a movie with his friends. Maybe I can do the same thing.'"

Nor does Smith wait for everything to be absolutely right, pointing out that "Clerks" isn't perfect, with its occasionally fluffed lines and wonky camera work. But it's got great charm.

"So many people just wither and die on the vine going: 'I gotta get it perfect.' "Clerks" is an excellent example of why it doesn't have to be perfect. Clerks looks like shit - but man, there's a fun idea at the centre and it was doing something you've never seen before at that point."

Smith went on to make slicker fare, many of his films cited as formative, cult classics. The two that followed "Clerks" - "Mallrats" and "Chasing Amy" - both feature a pre-Beniffer and Good Will Hunting Ben Affleck, who has recently been announced to play the next Batman. Post-Hollywood, Affleck did go on to make further appearances in his old mate Smith's films, but not without hassle.

"That was always the difficult one, getting Ben. Ben would always be like: 'Dude, I'm totally gonna do it.' But then he'd get on to his agent and his agent couldn't stand us because we made the movies where Ben had to take pay cuts or didn't get paid at all. That was always problematic - if we want to do it with Ben, we have to wait. But it was cool because he sold me his house very inexpensively in Los Angeles. I've been living in that house 12 years," laughs Smith.

Dealing with agents is just one of the many things that Smith finds frustrating about filmmaking.

"Podcasting to me is so much easier and so much fun because I can sit there and tell you a zillion stories and I never have to say: 'Quick, get me Ben Affleck!' It takes storytelling to its absolute, bare, basic roots."

"Punching through water is what I feel like it is for me to make films. Speaking in pictures is not my first language. Telling you a story with my mouth - that is my first language. If I were a painter dude, I'd take a canvas and splash paint across it and you'd know how I was feeling. If I was a singer I could open up my mouth and blast a tune. 'Oh, feel the pain of what it feels like to be Kevin Smith! Or the joy of what it feels like to be Kevin Smith!'"

"Somebody once said a painter needs a brush, a musician needs an instrument but a filmmaker needs an army, or something like that. It's true."

But despite his frustrations with the movie industry, the director has filmed "Tusk," a horror film about a missing podcast journalist, which is released this year. And with the much anticipated "Clerks III" in the pipeline, he's not likely to be giving up filmmaking any time soon.

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