

“SILENT BOB”  
Speaks...and Steals



**KEVIN SMITH** EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH THE TREND-SETTING DIRECTOR OF *CLERKS*, *CHASING AMY* AND THE MUCH SCARIER *RED STATE*.

**K**evin Smith is independent filmmaking at its best. Besides introducing the counterculture heroes Jay and Silent Bob, his 1994 debut movie *Clerks* helped define the genre of small-budget, do-it-yourself motion pictures. The New Jersey native has gone on to write and direct a string of remarkable flicks, including *Mallrats*, *Dogma* and our favorite, *Zack and Miri Make a Porno*.

Smith recently made a startling announcement. Admittedly “done” with cinema, he now plans to focus primarily on his live one-man shows and podcasting via his extremely popular SModcasts. To get the full story, Arts & Entertainment Editor Keith Valcourt interviewed Smith, who talked about his impending retirement, penultimate film (*Red State*) and social media in the entertainment business, as well as his new love of weed and former habit of shoplifting copies of *HUSTLER*. (Don’t get any ideas!)

**HUSTLER: Do you know how many times we were told you would never do an interview with us?**

**KEVIN SMITH:** That’s ridiculous! I’ve been in *HUSTLER* in the past. I was still in Jersey, so it was in the 1990s when we were promoting *Jay and Silent Bob Strike Back*. It was a lovely three-page piece that legitimized my ability to keep porn on my desk publicly. I said, “There’s an interview with me in it—as well as major gash-shots.” (*Laughs.*) Never in a million years would I have turned down the chance to be in *HUSTLER* again. It’s frustrating to hear, yet not surprising.

**Do publicists prevent you from doing things you’re up for?**

Not anymore ‘cause I no longer have one. I had a personal publicist. Then every movie studio you work with has their own publicist. Whoever is paying for the movie wants to control the flow of information. And I get it. There are millions of dollars at play. They want to control every piece of information because that’s the way the studios have always done it.

**That’s all changed now with Facebook and Twitter.**

In the age of social media, the floodgates are open. A science has built

up around this within the entertainment industry as people try to figure out social media and harness it. I heard from a social media guy whose company works with my agency—William Morris Endeavor—that all agencies are learning to use social media. But they don’t like it because there’s no control. Suddenly, if someone tweets me, “Can we do an interview?” and I say, “Yes,” who needs a publicist?

**Do you remember the first time you saw *HUSTLER*?**

My cousin was the first person who actually showed me *HUSTLER* and taught me the difference between *Playboy* and *HUSTLER*. In *Playboy* the women looked very pretty, but in *HUSTLER* they looked real. And you got to see more. You actually got to see bush, which was a big term in the day. Bush! Once I saw *HUSTLER*, I had to own it. That’s where Katz’s Confectionery—which was a grill, coffee shop, magazine stand and five-and-dime all in one—came into play. They had a magazine wall to die for—a selection worthy of New York City. *HUSTLER* started me shoplifting because I certainly couldn’t afford skin mags.

I would go to Katz’s to peruse, then take stuff off the shelves to this area where they had a rack that faced away from the register. If you were behind it, they couldn’t see you anymore. They had a bunch of stuff on the lower shelf like boxes of folders. I would lift that up, put whatever I grabbed under that and let a good cache build up over the course of a couple of weeks. Then I would go in with a big bag and do a collect. I would have all these magazines, and *HUSTLER* was the key to it all because that was the one worth getting caught for. When you want to jerk off, airbrushing is not good.

**How many copies of *HUSTLER* did you end up stealing?**

I did that for the better part of a fucking year. I built up quite a collection of *HUSTLER*s and comic books too. I would keep them for two to three months and then pass them on to a friend. That’s what you did before the Internet. It’s weird to think of a time before Internet porn.

**Are you really going to stop making movies?**

Yeah. *Hit Somebody* is going to be my last film. I think I’m done. I feel I’m done. I know I’m done. I knew I was done right around the time I was making *Zack and Miri* [2008]. At this point, it feels like I’m not doing anything original. I’m redoing myself, and I’m doing [comedy producer/director Judd] Apatow at the same time. I like the fact that when I got in the business, I pushed the edge of the envelope.

*Clerks* was different. *Mallrats* [1995], even though it was a throwback, was different at that time. And *Chasing Amy* [1997] was very fucking different. That stuff felt like I was doing art, doing something worthwhile. I was young, dumb and full of cum, piss and vinegar. The quality of the work is always going to be fucking better when you have that sense of urgency—that you *want* to tell stories.

Once you make films and tell stories for a living, it becomes your job. Suddenly it’s not like, “Oh, man, I got a fire in my belly to do this!” It becomes, “Well, I make movies, so what movie are we going to make next year?”

*Clerks*, *Mallrats*, *Chasing Amy* and *Dogma* [1999] were the first 21 years of my life on film. Then I stopped living a real life and started living a pretend life. That’s all you do; all your experiences are about making movies for a living. By the time I got to *Jay and Silent Bob Strike Back* [2001], what was that? It’s a movie about making movies. I was able to find a way to try to

make a mainstream movie. I’ve tried to blend so often in Hollywood and do one of *their* films.

**Is that why you did *Cop Out*?**

*Cop Out* [2010] was me saying, “If I’m going to leave film altogether, then let me go out strong, make a couple of really good flicks and end my fucking career on a high note like a *Seinfeld* ending and then do other things.” It was clear that podcasting was taking more of my time and that doing the live shows was more interesting. I had always said no to working for big studios. For years, Harvey Weinstein said to me, “The big studios are terrible. They make crap! We make art.” [Editor’s Note: Weinstein is a big-time Hollywood producer and cofounder of Miramax Films, which bought and distributed *Clerks* and other Smith titles.]

After a while you realize there’s no difference. Sometimes you get lucky on a movie, and it’s really cool. Other times you don’t get lucky, and it’s crap. At Miramax, we were trained to believe we were making

art, and it was us versus them—art versus banality and commerce. After a while we met the enemy, and they was us. *Cop Out* was me saying, “I always said I wouldn’t do this shit. Let me see if I can do this shit—and see if I’ll enjoy it.”

**Was making *Cop Out* as bad of an experience as we’ve heard?**

Everything about it was awesome except for the one guy [Bruce Willis] who didn’t seem like he wanted to be there. I’ll be honest. We got a version of the dude I hoped we’d get when we went to

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reshoots. I guess somebody talked to him, because that guy was with us for three days.

If you look at the movie, that is the really good stuff of his. He turned it on. But for the body of the shoot, he didn't seem interested in being there, which was disheartening because I took an 84% salary cut to make that movie. I got paid less than what I got paid on *Dogma* back in the day. At first, I kicked in half of my already cut salary to get the movie green-lit—all because I wanted to work with Bruce Willis. I could be accused of setting the bar too high for him, but I don't think so. I'm a pretty easy-going cat.

When that was done, I knew I was not the guy who directs movies in a studio system. I could sit there treading water and making movies for somebody else, but that's not the kid who saw *Slacker* and said, "I wanna make films." I wasn't sitting there going, "I want to make somebody else's film and make a ton of money." That shit is nice, and I don't begrudge anyone for doing it, but that wasn't the calling I had.

**If filmmaking was your calling, how can you suddenly leave it behind?**

I don't know if filmmaking *was* my calling. Maybe it was for a very specific time. I wanted to make *Clerks*, and that was it. I thought, *We'll make this movie Clerks, and it will show people we know how to make movies. Then the next time, maybe they'll give us some money to make a movie so I don't have to pay for it myself.*

Then boom! It happened. Right place. Right time. We benefited from that perfect fucking tim-

ing, but I wasn't prepared to have an entire career doing this. I used to say, "Nobody could make the films I make." But it got to a point when I thought, *Well, somebody could make that.*

*Jersey Girl?* [Smith's 2004 romantic comedy] Anybody could do that. I loved being a filmmaker and never bitched about it. It gave me everything in life. It was an honor to have done it. I think it's run its course. It's time to leave it to the kids with that "fire in their belly" because they're gonna make better shit than I'm gonna make at this point. I want to go out strong, and that's what *Red State* is for me.

***Red State* is a real departure for you. Was it harder to make than a comedy?**

Easier in so many ways. *Red State* [2011] was the easiest movie I made since *Clerks* because it was with the same kind of "I don't give a fuck, let's try it" attitude. There was something nice about going back to make a film for art's sake. Do it for the love and not care what the critics would say.

**Catholics howled in protest when you made *Dogma*. Were you worried that *Red State* might piss off all the extremist cults?**

The "fuck you" doesn't come from the religious people on this movie. Even if I said this is based on Fred Phelps and the Westboro Baptist Church. That's a church [in Topeka, Kansas] of 20 or 30 people. Nobody in their right mind is standing up for that fucking church. I couldn't wait for someone to say, "This is an unfair depiction!" But thank God they were clearly all smart enough to say, "This is not worth fighting over."

**What inspired you to do podcasts?**



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From being bored in between movies, looking for things to do and just hanging out with my friends bullshitting. My favorite part of making the movies had become doing the director's commentary tracks. That eventually led to the SModcast podcasting thing. Shit like that had been slowly bubbling and got really quick and hot over the past couple of years when I started smoking weed. Pot will help you chase whimsies.

Back in the day, before weed, you have a good idea like, *Man, it would be fun to record the conversation when I'm sitting around with my friends talking.* I've read all the stuff on the Internet about how people love the commentary tracks. Maybe they would just listen to us talking about fucking nothing like on the *Howard Stern Show*.

Then that voice of doubt creeps in: "If you're going to throw that out there, people are going to shit all over you. Who do you think you are? Your friends aren't all that interesting." But when you're a weed person, you take a hit and say, "Let's just give it a shot."

**Are podcasts the new independent film in a way?**

To me, absolutely. I would choose podcasting over filmmaking any day of the week. It's a much more pure form of storytelling. Anybody can do it. Film is a lot like playing ice hockey. You need a lot of equipment. It's a great sport. But, man, you gotta have some fucking money to do it. Film is a great art form. But, man, you gotta have some fucking money to do it. Podcasting is like baseball, football or basketball. You can pick up a game anywhere. All you need is a ball. Anybody can play.

**What kind of research did you do before getting started on *Zack and Miri Make a Porno*?**

Aside from just years of looking, reading and masturbating to porn? Nothing. Someone asked if we needed a technical consultant from the adult-film industry on it, but we didn't because that movie was barely about porno. To me, that movie was clearly the story of how we made *Clerks*. But instead, [producer] Scott Mosier was a girl, and we fucked. (Laughs.)

**How would you feel if a young director remade any of your films?**

I don't know if that would bother me. *Clerks* would be pretty easy to remake. It's just two guys in a convenience store. I think the video store aspect of it wouldn't work now. Show me a video store these days. *Mallrats* is also antiquated at this point. Kids would be like, "What's a mall?!" Most people do their shopping and their hanging out online.

I'd be interested to see it, but I can't imagine [a young director] would remake any of those fucking pictures. When people go to the movies now, they want to see comic book movies or alien movies. Spectacles! My movies are just people sitting around talking. 🤖