

# 'Chasing Amy' not worth pursuing

By Robert McGuire  
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In his stand-up days, Steve Martin was famous for handling hecklers in the audience by shooting back, "Gee, I remember my first beer." The point being that some people can't handle their liquor.

The characters in the film "Chasing Amy" make you want to remark, "Gee, I remember my first philosophy class." They can't handle their Nietzsche and are like the annoying drunk who thinks he knows everything and has to share the insight at great length.

Director Kevin Smith calls "Chasing Amy" the third installment in his New Jersey Trilogy, with "Clerks" and "Mallrats" the first two in the series. He ought to call it the "Disillusioned Goatee-Guy Trilogy." His characters drip with fashionable disaffection.

Smith's characters are older now — more mature he calls them. But they're only mature if you think the combination of a college education, a too-large sense of

entitlement and a moderate wit constitute maturity. Boring and pretentious is a more accurate description.

We meet the 26-year-old Holden McNeil (Ben Affleck) and Banky Edwards (Jason Lee) — best friends since kindergarten — on the verge of making it big as creators of a comic book about the difficulties of being twentysomethings. As they wrestle with maintaining the integrity of their art in the face of commercial success, Holden gets distracted from his art and friendship by another comic book artist, Alyssa Jones (Joey Lauren Adams.)

Holden thinks Alyssa might be interested in him too but — here's a shocker — she's a lesbian. Still, she'd like to be friends. So they hang out, and Holden tries to keep his feelings to himself and play "sensitive guy." Banky plays "obnoxious guy."

He spouts worn out theories about sexuality and about how lesbians just need the right man. Holden is more sentimental and tolerant, so when he does "convert" Alyssa, the anxious straight viewer can



Ben Affleck (left) and Joey Lauren Adams chatting over a beer in "Chasing Amy," a film directed by Kevin Smith.

take comfort without actually sympathizing with Banky's bigotry. The film tells us we should believe lesbians aren't really attracted to women, they are just being "thorough," as Alyssa puts it, in their search for real love.

The old-fashioned sexual politics of the movie might be fine with some viewers, but few are likely to excuse the transparency and tedium of how the point is made. Along the way are awkward, undramatic and only occasionally funny philosophical discussions.

Smith is good at creating potentially funny situations — an irrational debate over whether or not cartoon characters

Archie and Jughead were lovers, for example. There are a few chuckles here. But the situations are burdened with an inordinate sense of importance.

Worst of all, Smith keeps hiring the same wooden actors to deliver his wooden lectures. Perhaps the only qualification to star in his movies is the willingness to memorize all the lines.

The bitterness and difficulty of youth is a legitimate theme for a film, and it ought to be done with more sobriety and intelligence than "Chasing Amy."

"Chasing Amy" is rated R for adult language and frank discussions of sex.

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