

TELEVISION EUNY HONG KORAL

## Sex (and comics) in the city

Some of my best friends are Fan Boys. That's the derisive, all-purpose term for any emotionally stunted adult male who channels his libido into a little boy's hobby. Comic books, *Star Trek* and *Dungeons and Dragons* remain powerful influences throughout the Fan Boy's life.

For the most part, they learn to fake social adjustment as well as the rest of us, have responsible jobs, and would just as soon not discuss their interior lives with outsiders. But with some prodding, you can get them to give you a tour of your city's bowels, where the tiny comic book storefronts can be found, wedged in the shadows between empty warehouses.

Director Kevin Smith has explored this offbeat world through several of his movies, including *Clerks* (1994), which is now being made into a prime-time cartoon series. (ABC. Aired Wednesdays at 9:30 pm ET.)

At first blush, the concept seems quite felicitous. An animated cartoon would appear to be the logical next step after the successful film and the *Clerks* comic book series that Smith drew himself. If I were a network executive being pitched this idea, I would have been the first to stake my career on this show. And I would have been the first to be fired, because the show isn't any good.

Part of the problem is strictly a matter of genre. The movie version of *Clerks* was shot entirely in a convenience store, using black and white film – undoubtedly, these were cost-saving necessities in that low-budget film. But Smith made this cheap, grainy look work in his favour by cleverly setting

In the splendour of colour animation, this remote-camera feeling is lost.

Moreover, the lengthy, go-nowhere dialogue that was the film's trademark doesn't translate well into a half-hour TV format. As *The Simpsons* and its many knock-offs have demonstrated, even a cartoon has to adopt the plot structure of a sitcom – and plot is anathema to the entire *Clerks* ethos.

One of the signature scenes from the *Clerks* film is one in which two deadbeat store clerks argue over whether Darth Vader from the *Star Wars* trilogy

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had to employ private contractors to complete construction of the Death Star.

They are not being entirely facetious, and they get so involved in the debate that they completely ignore their customers. How can you make a cartoon depict characters who can while away their time with such absurd intensity?

Animated cartoons have to be animated, which proves problematic for this ABC production. The characters are constantly engaged in hyperkinetic activity, which doesn't mesh with this story's slovenly

memories of 1970s TV? At which point does the allusive become the tiresomely unoriginal? Disappointingly, this programme's creators are perhaps too far outside their netherworld element to consider these questions.

This week brings the season premiere of *Sex and the City*, the Emmy-studded HBO series about four Manhattan career women. The premiere begins with this observation: "Maybe some women like to be rescued." Rescued from this show, perhaps. (HBO. Sunday, June 4, at 9pm ET.)

What a boondoggle this series is. Its creators have managed to convince award committees this is some kind of latter-day Jane Austen oeuvre. The only similarity with Austen is that the characters are ravenously searching for rich husbands, and go to country cottages for the summer.

The programme's true origins are closer to a boys' locker room. The characters have co-opted every English word and phrase to be synonymous with sex, as in: "I'd like to show him my lower Manhattan."

This is the programme in which the women wear halter tops year-round and continually flash their bare armpits; you probably thought it was a deodorant commercial.

The dialogue reminds one of the snippets of conversation one has the misfortune to overhear when dining in a Manhattan bistro and seated next to a couple trying to impress each other on a blind date: "Staten Island is like a quaint European country; the American music is 20 years behind, and you can smoke anywhere you want."