

Action Figure

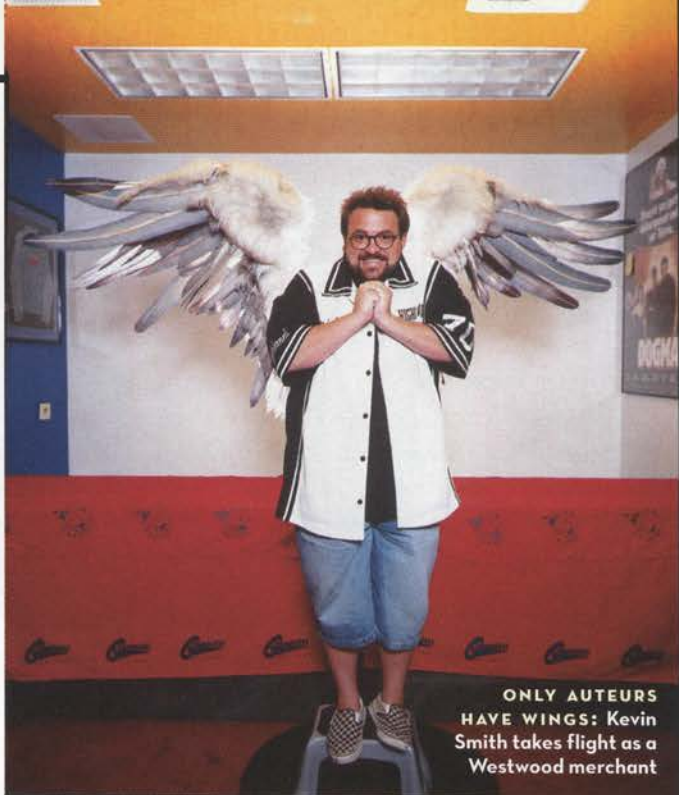
At his new comic book store, director Kevin Smith is the reigning superhero *by Robert Ito*

JAY AND SILENT BOB'S SECRET STASH is equal parts comic book store and prop-filled tribute to every Kevin Smith film ever made. It's directed, produced, and underwritten by Smith himself, and named after the heroes introduced in *Clerks*, his cut-rate cult debut. Near stacks of *Batman* stands the silvery breastplate, complete with bloodied wing stumps, that fallen angel Ben Affleck wore in *Dogma*. A glass case in back holds the wooden toy trucks from *Mallrats*, and Jennifer Lopez's gravestone from *Jersey Girl* keeps the employee bathroom door ajar. Kelly Spears, the store's 22-year-old manager and a model of cheerful efficiency, places comic book orders underneath a sign that spells out one of the most enduring lines of dialogue from *Clerks*—"I'm not even supposed to be here today!"—which has since become a battle cry for disgruntled wage slaves everywhere.

Actor Jason Mewes—aka Jay, the amiable dope smoker of *Clerks*, and dependable player in four of Smith's subsequent films—has been hired on as, well, a clerk. This afternoon he can be seen crouching behind a window display, replenishing it with fresh copies of *Wolverine* and *Spiderman/Doctor Octopus: Year One*. Mewes also stocks the rack of plastic figurines of Jay, which he'll sign if a customer asks him to.

"I always thought I would own a comic book store one day," says Smith, the 34-year-old goateed, bespectacled owner, who comes into the shop several times a week. "You know, when the bottom of this film thing dropped out."

Actually, Smith opened a Secret Stash seven years ago in his hometown of Red Bank, New Jersey, in the first flush of his filmmaking suc-



ONLY AUTEURS HAVE WINGS: Kevin Smith takes flight as a Westwood merchant

cess. His love affair with retail started in Jersey, when he held the Quick Stop cashier job memorialized in *Clerks*. When Smith moved to Los Angeles in 2002, he began looking for locations for a second Secret Stash. Westwood seemed promising, but local lease restrictions prohibited him from carrying used comics, a mainstay of the field. "Our lease agreement says you're not allowed to sell pre-owned goods, and back issues are considered pre-owned goods," says Smith. Porn was out, too. "Which is kind of a shame," says Smith, "because I believe in porn."

Close proximity to Smith's favorite restaurant overcame all these purely commercial considerations. "That's why we moved here, because there's a Chili's across the street," says Smith. "Back home, every two blocks there's a Chili's. I guess there's no need for it out here because you have real Mexican food. Back home they don't, so we have Chili's."

Smith opened the store in September, celebrating the event with a signing of the tenth-anniversary DVD of *Clerks*. Organizers expected a few hundred people; when a crowd of nearly 2,000 arrived, Smith continued the party till 5 a.m. to accommodate the line of fans that curved around the block. "Mewes makes fun of me," says Smith, "because I'm always like, 'How you doing, man? Where you from?,' shit like that. He's like, 'You don't care where they're from.' And I'm like, 'Actually, Mewes, you don't care where they're from. I kind of do.'" **LA**



Hot Dog! It's Hollywood!

Need to locate the Bee Gees' or Anna May Wong's star on the Walk of Fame, or the most advantageous view of the Hollywood sign, or simply the one free public bathroom between Vine Street and Highland Avenue? Consult "Scooby's Practical Guide to Hollywood," created as a public service by Stephen Hooper, co-owner of Scooby's Hot Dogs on Hollywood Boulevard. The free map includes not just the usual tourist traps but also cautionary advice about the locals ("the balmy California climate attracts many out-of-luck borderline types") and such unorthodox itineraries as the quickest route from Frederick's of Hollywood to the Church of the Blessed Sacrament. —Andrea Richards