



October 2003

Bruce Almighty

Julien R. Fielding

University of Nebraska at Omaha, jfielding@unomaha.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/jrf>

Please take our feedback survey at: https://unomaha.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8cchtFmpDyGfBLE

Recommended Citation

Fielding, Julien R. (2003) "Bruce Almighty," *Journal of Religion & Film*: Vol. 7: Iss. 2, Article 10.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/jrf/vol7/iss2/10>

This Film Review is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@UNO. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Religion & Film by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@UNO. For more information, please contact unodigitalcommons@unomaha.edu.

Bruce Almighty

Abstract

This is a review of *Bruce Almighty* (2003).

Bruce Nolan (Jim Carrey) has a wonderful life: a girlfriend (Jennifer Aniston) who loves him, a job as a television reporter, a roof over his head and food in the refrigerator. But he's not content. He wants more, primarily an anchor position that remains beyond his grasp. There is, as he says, "an anti-Bruce barrier" that he just can't penetrate. And God is (Morgan Freeman) the one getting the blame. "God's picking on me. God why do you hate me. he's ignoring me. he's a mean kid with a magnifying glass and I'm the ant."

Thinking he's getting his big break, Nolan agrees to do a live feed at Niagara Falls. It's while he's wearing a silly umbrella hat and getting drenched that he learns his rival, Evan Baxter, (Steve Carrell) has won the coveted anchor spot. Making it worse, Evan rubs it in by including Bruce's material in his acceptance speech. Not able to control himself any longer, Bruce unleashes a barrage of profanity on the air. Needless to say he gets fired. On the way to his car he tries to help a homeless man who is being harassed by a gang but ends up getting beat up. "This is what you get for trying to help someone," he shouts. "This is my reward." On his girlfriend's advice he decides to pray, but only ends up crashing his car. "Smite Me Oh Mighty Smiter," he yells to the heavens.

God responds to Bruce's challenge but not in the way the reporter expects. Instead of sending him boils or a plague of locusts, God endows Bruce all his powers - thus the title *Bruce Almighty* - so he can try his hand at running the

world. The only stipulations being: Bruce can't tell anyone he's God and he can't mess with free will. Because Bruce has tunnel vision and only thinks of himself, he only employs his powers for self-gain. But by neglecting everyone else's needs, the trouble begins. Ego is where Bruce takes the wrong turn, and God shows him the errors of his ways. However, some might wonder at what cost? God gives Bruce free reign, allowing him to pull the moon closer so he can woo his girlfriend and to make a meteor crash to earth so he can become Mr. Exclusive. The writers of *Bruce Almighty*, Steve Koren, Mark O'Keefe, Steve Oedekerk, cleverly show us - with subtlety - how these events negatively impact the rest of the planet. Would God threaten humanity to teach one man a lesson? We'll never know the answer, but it certainly could open up some interesting and thoughtful dialogue.

What might seem a formulaic film - it contains references to *It's A Wonderful Life* - *Bruce Almighty* is actually very entertaining. Carrey has worked this sort of material before and with this director, Tom Shadyac. In fact, *Bruce Almighty* contains a number of in jokes that fans of *Ace Ventura: Pet Detective* and *Liar, Liar* will get. But those familiar with Biblical stories also will have a good time catching the visual references, such as a silly CGI recreation of the parting of the Red Sea (this time with tomato soup) and a scene where Bruce turns water into wine. The soundtrack, too, compliments the film well with tracks such

as "God Gave Me Everything" by Mick Jagger, "One of Us" by Joan Osborne, "You're a God" by Vertical Horizon and "The Power" by Snap!.

For a film about God, it's refreshing to see that *Bruce Almighty*'s message isn't about looking for miracles or letting a higher power solve a person's woes.

As Freeman says, "people keep looking up. That's the problem." The real miracle is for people to do it for themselves; no matter what the obstacles.