

## Holy Smoke

The provocative New Zealander Jane Campion (*The Piano, A Portrait of a Lady*) has come up with another provocation with *Holy Smoke*, setting up a conflict between a young woman's fervent new beliefs and a professional deprogrammer hired to wrench her from what her family deems a cult.

Ruth (Kate Winslet) has been smitten with the "Baba" in India and wants to commit her life to him, but her worried family back in the Australian outback tricks her into coming back home with false news about her father's health and puts her in the hands of a successful American "cult exiter," one P.J. Waters (Harvey Keitel). It is an intriguing idea, with considerable potential for personal and philosophical fireworks between the protagonists. Winslet is very fine as the aspiring acolyte; she is no dippy young pushover but a committed woman who vigorously defends her new life choice. Her conversion, too, telescoped in an entrancing, even ecstatic, opening sequence in India, makes her newfound devotion seem believable and right.

The film's principal problem is with the P.J. character. Made out to be a facile manipulator of both Tough Love and New Age clichés and vain in the bargain (his jet black dye job), his will simply cannot contend with Ruth's. Worse, P.J. violates every ethic in the book by getting his pulchritudinous charge in the sack.

Speaking of sacks, Ruth's variably dysfunctional family is full of sad ones, most (the exception is the troubled mother played by Julie Hamilton) shown as grossly comic types to contrast them with the more serious-minded Ruth. The almost slapstick tone of their scenes detracts from what should be the contest for the soul of Ruth waged by the two principals. As stated, an intriguing concept--but an opportunity missed this time.

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