

= Damien ( South Park ) =

" Damien " is the tenth episode in the first season of the American animated television series South Park . It originally aired on Comedy Central in the United States on February 4 , 1998 . In the episode , the boys ' class is joined by a new student named Damien , who has been sent by his father Satan to find Jesus and arrange a boxing match between the two . The majority of South Park 's residents bet on Satan to win the match due to his enormous size and muscular physique , but Satan ultimately throws the fight and reveals he bet on Jesus , thus winning everybody 's money .

The episode was written by series co @-@ creators Trey Parker and Matt Stone , with additional dialogue by Dave Polsky , and directed by Parker . The episode serves as a satire on religion , faith and the nature of good and evil , as well as a commentary on commercialism , the cult of celebrity in America and the nature of children . It was originally conceptualized as a Christmas special , but the original broadcast was pushed forward when Parker and Stone decided instead to make " Mr. Hankey , the Christmas Poo " the season 's holiday episode .

" Damien " received generally positive reviews and was viewed by 3 @.@ 2 million households when it was first broadcast , making it the highest rated cable program the week it aired . The episode marked the first appearance of Satan , who would become a recurring South Park character , as well as the character of Damien himself , who was inspired by the antagonist of the 1976 horror film The Omen . Parker and Stone also said the episode introduced several key characteristics of the Cartman character that have endured throughout the rest of the series . Michael Buffer , the boxing ring announcer best known for the catchphrase " Let 's get ready to rumble ! " , makes a guest appearance in " Damien " as himself .

= = Plot = =

Cartman is excited about his upcoming birthday party and lets everyone invited know what present he expects to receive from each . When they protest , he threatens to ban them from eating the food his mother makes , something that immediately convinces them . They encounter a new student named Damien , son of Satan . The other boys mock the " new kid " and , in response , Damien turns Kenny into a duck @-@ billed platypus . Damien informs Jesus that Satan will rise for a final battle with him of good versus evil . South Park residents immediately begin making bets on the fight . Cartman is angered to learn the event is scheduled for the same time as his party , and the children struggle to choose between the two events .

The entire town bets on Jesus to win the fight , but begin to lose faith when Satan appears for the weigh @-@ in . He is huge and weighs a little over 320 pounds ( 150 kg ) , while Jesus weighs a mere 135 pounds ( 61 kg ) , and the citizens of South Park begin changing their bets . Jesus confronts the South Park residents about their changed betting slips after learning only one person is still betting on Jesus to win . Distraught , Jesus asks Stan , Kyle and Chef to help him train . Damien gets counseling from Mr. Mackey , who recommends he just try being nice no matter what the other children do , just like with unpopular British child Pip . Damien tries to apologize to the boys for setting fire to the playground and turning Kenny into a duck @-@ billed platypus , stating that he was " doing his father 's bidding " and he did not have a choice . The boys , however , still continue to act negatively towards Damien . Cartman 's birthday party begins , as does the fight . Damien and Pip arrive uninvited to the party , but the children finally accept Damien after he hurls Pip in the air and makes him explode in a shower of fireworks . However , a furious Cartman ends his party early after opening Kyle 's present to discover that it 's not what he had in mind .

Meanwhile , Jesus is disheartened by the town 's lack of faith in him , and he does not retaliate to Satan 's attacks against him , despite Satan 's apparent taunting of " hit me " . Chef and the children make it for the end of the fight and offer Jesus some words of encouragement . Inspired , Jesus finally throws a single weak punch . However , Satan then takes a dive and goes down for the count . Afterward , Satan reveals that his plan had , in fact , been to bet on Jesus and then throw the fight , winning him a lot of money and real estate from the South Park residents . The townspeople are angered by this , until Stan reminds them that Jesus told them not to bet on Satan . The whole town

then asks forgiveness of Jesus , who accepts the apology . Kenny dies when Jimbo identifies him as a rare duck @-@ billed platypus and shoots him . Damien bids goodbye to Stan and Kyle since his dad " is always on the move " he has to leave . Meanwhile , Cartman has continued his party even after kicking everyone out and having eaten all the food himself .

= = Production = =

" Damien " was written by series co @-@ creators Trey Parker and Matt Stone , with additional dialogue by Dave Polsky , and was directed by Parker . " Damien " first aired on Comedy Central in the United States on February 4 , 1998 . It was highly anticipated in part because it was the first new episode of South Park in about two months , since the extremely popular Christmas special " Mr. Hankey , the Christmas Poo " aired on December 17 , 1997 . Before " Damien " even ran , Mike Duffy of Detroit Free Press said the episode was " certain to become one of the show 's signature moments " . In fact , Parker and Stone originally intended for " Damien " to be the season 's Christmas episode . Although they had long planned to feature Mr. Hankey in the show , they did not decide to make him a Christmas character until halfway through the filming of " Damien " , during which time they decided to make " Mr. Hankey , the Christmas Poo " the holiday episode instead . Nevertheless , they decided to finish production of " Damien " first , even though it would not air until after the " Mr. Hankey " episode .

Parker said he and Stone did not intend for " Damien " to be offensive to Christians or any other religion : " In South Park , Jesus is a great guy , he 's on our show , and in this episode he 's the hero . We 're not in the business of offending people . We 're in the business of making people laugh . " The mean way Damien is treated by his fellow students when he joins the school , as well as Damien 's reactions to the treatment , were inspired by Parker 's experience of the second grade , when he started at a Cheyenne , Wyoming elementary school in the last three weeks of the school year . Parker said , " It was brutal ... Everybody already had their little groups and the year was almost over , so I wasn 't going to fit into any of them , and I just wanted to destroy and kill , which was the inspiration for this show . "

Michael Buffer , the boxing ring announcer best known for his catchphrase , " Let 's get ready to rumble ! " , made a guest appearance as himself in " Damien " . Parker and Stone originally planned to use the catchphrase without Buffer , but when they learned that Buffer had legally trademarked the phrase , they included him in the episode since getting the rights for the catchphrase cost nearly as much as hiring Buffer for a guest appearance . Parker and Stone both said Buffer was friendly and they enjoyed working with him . Voice actor Mike Judge , star of Beavis and Butt @-@ Head and King of the Hill , had originally been slated to provide the voice of the Damien character , and even recorded several lines for the part . However , since Judge lives in Austin , Texas , it proved too difficult to for him to come back and rerecord lines as the script and episode changed , so Stone instead provided the character 's voice . Judge later provided Kenny 's un @-@ muffled line when he removed his parka in South Park : Bigger , Longer & Uncut .

By the time " Damien " was animated , much of the drawing and animation responsibilities that had previously been handled by Parker and Stone were now being delegated to a team of animators . The duo were particularly proud of the animation during the boxing match between Jesus and Satan , which used elements of perspective and three @-@ dimension seldom used in the series before ; Parker said it was " definitely the most action [ oriented ] stuff we 'd done [ so far ] " . While animating Jesus , Parker and Stone deliberately left glitches in the animation that made it appear skin was showing beneath the beard on the left @-@ hand side of the character 's face . Parker said this was done because it was the way Jesus appeared in the crudely animated The Spirit of Christmas , a 1995 animated short film by Parker and Stone that served as a precursor to South Park , and they wanted to maintain that nuance for the character .

Parker and Stone said a number of Cartman 's characteristics which have endured throughout the South Park series started in " Damien " . Specifically , his voice took on a higher @-@ pitch that was more nasally and whiney than in previous episodes ; Stone described it as a " self @-@ indulgent accent " . Some of his regular vocal mannerisms were also developed in the episode , including his

use of the sound " Nyah " while saying the word " Here " , and the way he says " Hey you guuuuuuys " while talking to his friends . Parker , who provides the voice of Cartman , said the characteristics came about naturally while filming the episode : " This show for some reason , for whatever reason , maybe I just lost interest , but I was trying all these messed up things with him and all these things sort of stuck . "

" Damien " included the first appearance of Satan , who would become a commonly recurring character throughout the series . Although Satan displays an evil and unscrupulous personality in " Damien " , he is portrayed in later episodes as a thoughtful , sensitive and often deeply conflicted character . " Damien " was the first episode Parker and Stone wrote that included school counselor Mr. Mackey and local religious leader Priest Maxi , but they were also included in " Mr. Hankey , the Christmas Poo " , which aired before " Damien " even though it was produced afterward . Although Jesus had been introduced as a South Park character in previous episodes , " Damien " marked the first time he interacted with the main characters outside of his public access talk show , Jesus and Pals . Parker said many viewers thought the character was a crazy person who falsely believed he was Jesus , and he and Stone wanted to show in this episode that he was supposed to be the actual Jesus . " Damien " is also the first episode to feature South Park 's bar , which is simply called " Bar " .

Prior to the broadcast , Parker and Stone said " Damien " would be the first episode in which Kenny would not be killed ; ultimately , however , Kenny was shot by Jimbo at the end of the pay @-@ per @-@ view fight . Kenny is turned into a duck @-@ billed platypus in the episode , which Parker said was done because , " Duck billed platypuses are something I 've always been infatuated with . They 're just so bizarre . " In the original script , Pip , the unpopular British student inspired by the character of the same name in Charles Dickens 's Great Expectations , was originally supposed to be killed and permanently removed from the show after " Damien " , in which Damien projects Pip into the air and blows him up in a shower of fireworks . However , Parker and Stone decided they should not kill any student characters except for Kenny , so they decided not to kill Pip and to bring him back for future episodes .

" Damien " was later released , along with eleven other episodes , in a three @-@ DVD set in November 1998 . It was included in the second volume , which also included the episodes " An Elephant Makes Love to a Pig " , " Death " and " Pinkeye " . The episode , along with the other twelve from the first season , was also included in the DVD release " South Park : The Complete First Season " , which was released on November 12 , 2002 . Parker and Stone recorded commentary tracks for each episode , but they were not included with the DVDs due to " standards " issues with some of the statements ; Parker and Stone refused to allow the tracks to be edited and censored , so they were released in a CD completely separately from the DVDs .

= = Themes = =

" Damien " has been described as a satire on religion , faith and the nature of good and evil , as well as a commentary on commercialism and the cult of celebrity in American culture . Parker said the writers sought to satirize the speed and ease at which the followers of Jesus lose faith in him and bet against him . Religious writer Michel Clasquin said the abandonment of Jesus demonstrates , " Like many people in the real world , the faith of the town 's people cannot withstand the hard times . " Parker said , " Everybody puts their trust in Satan and ends up getting screwed . There is a bigger message ? all in all , a pretty wholesome message . That 's why South Park works . Sometimes we have a message . "

Parker also said he and Stone purposely wrote the episode to present Jesus as the hero from a " humanist approach " ; Clasquin said this is demonstrated by the fact that Jesus becomes caught up in people 's expectations for the fight and becomes offended when people bet against him : " This satirical gesture beautifully draws attention to the sheer humanity of Jesus . He really is a man , just as we are men and women . He is open to fear and uncertainty . " Several writers said the episode also lampooned the way Americans can turn anything , even a religious situation , into a commercially hyped event . Matt Zoller Seitz of The Star @-@ Ledger said : " They aren 't making

fun of organized religion ( though they have in the past ) . They 're making fun of those who would turn religion into entertainment and entertainment into a kind of religion . " Seitz said the episode mocks " morality cops who misbehave in private " like Priest Maxi , who secretly bets the parish against Jesus even as he admonished congregation members for siding with Satan .

Religious writer Michel Clasquin said the episode also demonstrates the ease with which people blend their religious convictions with lessons from pop culture , particularly with Stan 's confusion of a Star Trek quote with a lesson from Jesus Christ . Additionally , Clasquin said the fact that even Priest Maxi recognizes Jesus as " that guy from the public access show " demonstrates that even the supposedly most religious people are not always the most open to genuine religious experiences . Clasquin also said elements of the Crucifixion of Jesus are alluded to in the boxing match with Satan .

In addition to the religious themes , the cruel way in which Damien is treated by the other children is a satire on the tendency of schoolchildren to relentlessly pick on new students . Stone said of this aspect of the episode , " The whole basis of South Park was that kids are little shitheads and civilization and society controls them . Instead of what a lot of hippies and Democrats think , which is we 're born innocent and pure and society corrupts us . We believe the first way , that society controls you and makes you a better person , ultimately , because when you 're little , you 're just a little asshole . "

= = Cultural references = =

The voice for Satan , provided by Parker , was inspired by the voice of the Pinhead character at the ending of the 1988 horror film , Hellbound : Hellraiser II , when Pinhead emotionally recalls his old life , when he was a good person . The animators went through several sketch drafts for Satan because , in Parker 's words , " There 's so many ways to go with him and we couldn 't figure out the right one for a long time " . The large and muscular look of the character stemmed from the fact that the script called for Satan to massively outweigh Jesus , and that look has persisted for the character throughout the rest of the series .

The character of Damien himself was also first featured in this episode ; although he appeared as a background character in a handful of future episodes , he seldom has a speaking role and is never again featured as prominently as he was in " Damien " . The character was inspired by Damien Thorn , the child antichrist character in the 1976 horror film The Omen . The music which plays in the episode whenever Damien performs magic is also directly inspired by the music from that film ; that same demonic chorus would later be reused in the twelfth season episode " Britney 's New Look " . ( The lyric " Rectus Dominus " repeatedly sung by the demonic chorus in the episode translates from Latin as " Ass Master " . ) The scene in which the boys tell Damien his mom is " a real dog " is also a reference to The Omen . In that film , the actual Antichrist 's mother was a jackal .

In addition to Michael Buffer , the American boxing promoter Don King is featured prominently in " Damien " as Satan 's promoter . Parker said he and Stone decided to spoof King only because " it 's just sort of who annoyed us that week . It 's so random ... there is no point to who we 're ripping on . It 's definitely nothing personal . " Nancy Kerrigan , the Olympic figure skater attacked on orders of fellow skater Tonya Harding at the 1994 Winter Olympics , is referred to in a pep talk Stan gives Jesus . Stan wrongfully claims Kerrigan won the gold medal until Kyle reminds him she won the silver ; Parker said this was done because he felt the perception of Kerrigan was extremely high among Americans considering she only actually achieved second place . During that same pep talk , Stan tells Jesus , " You know , someone once said , ' Don 't try to be a great man , just be a man . ' " Although Stan says this was a quote from Jesus himself , it was actually a line from the 1996 film , Star Trek : First Contact . " Damien " also includes a reference to singer Nancy Sinatra , the daughter of legendary crooner Frank Sinatra . Mr. Garrison , while discussing great singers of the baroque period , goes on to say that " Nancy Sinatra was quite a choice piece of ass " .

The Jesus Vs . Satan pay @-@ per @-@ view event " Boutin ' at the Mountain " is a parody of similarly advertised pay @-@ to @-@ watch boxing events featured on the premium cable channel

HBO . Before Jimbo shoots Kenny in his platypus state , he screams , " It 's coming right for us ! " This is a reference to the previous South Park episode " Volcano " , in which Jimbo takes the children hunting and tells them to shout the phrase before shooting anything to get around restrictive hunting laws . Cartman insults Damien by asking if he got his haircut from Stevie Wonder , a blind soul and R & B singer . For his birthday , Cartman wants the complete line of a set of action figures called Mega Man . Although named Mega Man , the multi @-@ colored figures were actually inspired by the Mighty Morphin Power Rangers , the 1993 children 's action series which was still popular at the time of the episode 's original broadcast . The script was originally written with direct references to the Power Rangers , but Comedy Central asked Parker and Stone to change the name due to copyright issues . Cartman receives Ants in the Pants , an actual children 's tabletop game , as a birthday present . Stone described Ants in the Pants as " the lamest game ever " , which is why Cartman responds so negatively to the gift in the episode .

= = Reception = =

" Damien " received a 6 @. @ 4 Nielsen rating , a record high for the show until it was broken two weeks later by the episode " Mecha @-@ Streisand " ( which received a 6 @. @ 9 rating , translating to 5 @. @ 4 million viewers in 3 @. @ 2 million households ) . It was the highest rated cable program the week it aired , with viewership among 18- to 49 @-@ year @-@ olds being higher than the number of households . The network averages viewer ratings of 276 @, @ 000 households during prime time and , prior to South Park , the channel 's highest rating was from the second season premiere of Absolutely Fabulous , which was seen by 1 @. @ 24 million households .

Parker said following the tremendous success of " Mr Hankey , the Christmas Poo " , much of the direct feedback he received for " Damien " was negative . Parker described it as the " first sort of backlash " he had experienced with South Park , with fans claiming the show was losing its edge and that Parker and Stone had " sold out " . Parker said , " We kept hearing that word so much . We were like , ' What does that mean , sold out ? What did we get and what did we do ? ' We just kept doing what we thought was funny , we didn 't go start making commercials or anything . But everybody was saying we sold out . " Nevertheless , the episode received generally positive reviews , and has been described as one of South Park 's " classic episodes " .

Rolling Stone contributor Doug Pratt called it a " high point " of the first season . Kinney Littlefield of the Orange County Register said of the episode , " All this proves once again that animated series are great platforms for hot topics that live action shows don 't dare grab head on . South Park 's allegory of good and evil is more apt and knowing than anything seen on ' Christy ' or ' Touched by an Angel ' . Funnier too . " However , Littlefield also said some of the show 's graphic dialogue , like the phrase " poop on a stick " , was growing " pretty darn redundant " . Gary Budzak of The Columbus Dispatch described the " Damien " episode as perhaps " the most outrageous yet " . Virginia Rohan of The Record praised the episode , saying , " The episode is funny , and ultimately , good does conquer evil , albeit for all the wrong reasons . " Chicago Sun @-@ Times writer Lon Grahne gave the episode three stars and called it simultaneously strange and funny . Eric Mink of the New York Daily News called the episode " awfully funny " and praised its satirical element , although he warned it was potentially very offensive to some viewers : " A scene in which the kids offer profane between @-@ rounds encouragement to Jesus could make even thick @-@ skinned viewers wince a bit . " Likewise , Star @-@ Ledger reporter Matt Zoller Seitz said , " Tonight 's episode is crazy , vulgar and borderline blasphemous ; it is also , if you 're in the right frame of mind , paralyzingly funny . "