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*The Adventures of Sinbad: A Religious Message for our Time?*

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The recent cartoon film, "Sinbad: Legend of the Seven Seas," contains the usual cartoon features. The film is full of jokes and gags, even in its most serious moments; there's the kind of fighting and narrow escapes that only toons can do; there is little character development; and many of the creatures are simply preposterous. But the film's plot centers around the struggle between the divine and the human worlds, where the divine world, or least the part that we see, is evil and the human world is good. This focus reflects, in many ways, the concerns of our own times.

The sacred object over which the two worlds fight is the "Book of Peace." This book unites in peace the city-states of the world -- apparently those around the Mediterranean Sea more than 2000 years ago. Sinbad, a notorious pirate, attempts to steal the book while it is being taken to its new temple in Syracuse. He fails, but only because Eris, the Goddess of Discord, interferes.

Once the book arrives in its new home, however, Eris steals the book and frames Sinbad, who is captured and sentenced to death. Before Sinbad can be executed, the heir to the throne of Syracuse exchanges himself for Sinbad, who is given 10 days to retrieve the Book of Peace from the goddess' island or the prince will be executed. The rest of the film reveals Sinbad and his crew's adventures while trying to get the book.

The interesting part of the film centers on the nature of the Book of Peace; its pages contain the universe. A look inside reveals not flat paper, but a multi-dimensional, "live," image of the cosmos, with planets, moons, stars and constellations. The book represents the cosmic order; the rules, the rhythms, and the harmonies that guide the universe as it moves through time and space.

This cosmic order is what Eris seeks to disrupt -- after all, she is the goddess of discord. Moreover,

the film depicts her realm as that of the cosmos. Not only does she inhabit the space around the Earth, looking down on its "tiny" sphere, but the creatures she commands are constellations themselves.

But this cartoon does not leave the idea of order there. Eris knows that the Book of Peace symbolizes the unity and order of the human world, but it is not a talisman that maintains order by some magical means. The human world will not fall into disorder by the book's theft, but by the death of the only rightful heir of Syracuse, which she expects Sinbad's failure to accomplish. Sinbad thwarts her plan by choosing to return to Syracuse and face the punishment for his failure, instead of letting the prince be executed.

So in the end, the film makes the point that humans and their choices ultimately determine the order of their world, not some magical or mechanistic link to the cosmos. Gods and goddesses may interfere, but in the end human choices and actions shape the present and the future. Order is desirable and important, but the course of that order can be shaped by humans.

Interestingly, this order, as depicted in the film, requires disorder. Sinbad is a rogue pirate who himself represents disorder in the film's opening scenes. It is this ability to defy order to achieve his goals that makes him the only person who can restore order.

So the film presents the orderliness and stability of human society as desirable and important. But it depicts a key moment in which that order becomes disrupted and it is only through disorderly actions that order can be restored. This message, I think, reflects the sentiments of many in our post-9/11 world.