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THUMBSUCKER

by Bob Westal
(2005-09-16)



2004, Rated R, 94 Minutes, Sony Pictures Classics

CREDITS



As bad habits go, thumbsucking really isn't all that bad. It doesn't give you cancer, break up your marriage, permanently scar family members, or leave unsightly track marks. Still, if you're in high school, it's hard to think of a worse habit for your social life or self-esteem, not to mention your parents' orthodontia bills. And that's just a part of the cross seventeen year-old Justin Cobb (Lou Pucci) has to bear.

His embarrassed father (Vincent D'Onofrio) still hasn't come to grips with being an full-fledged adult, and insists that Justin call his parents by his first name. His compassionate nurse mother is similarly conflicted, and toys with entering a "win a date" contest with TV celebrity Matt Schramm (Benjamin Bratt). In fact, every adult Justin knows, from his debate coach (Vince Vaughn) to his dentist-cum-guru (Keanu Reeves) is unable or unwilling to fully grow up. Even the beautiful and seemingly mature girl (Kelli Garner) who takes an interest in him regresses from the role of ecological activist to stoner.

As written and directed by TV commercial/rock video veteran Mike Mills, "Thumbsucker" (based

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- WALKING ON THE SKY
- THE MAN
- THE EXORCISM OF EMILY ROSE
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on a novel by Walter Kirn) benefits from a goofy yet incisive sense of humor and some extremely strong performances. Young Lou Pucci pulls off something of a coup, transitioning from traditional high school loser, to Ritalin-popping master debater, to would-be stoner and more while maintaining a strong personal core. Vince Vaughn and Tilda Swinton are utterly believable as the pair that would have produced this clearly bright but also completely adrift, young man. In the world of the goofy yet salient, Vince Vaughn, Benjamin Bratt, and especially Keanu Reeves all bring welcome humor and varying shades of strangeness.

With an intriguing song score featuring work by the Polyphonic Spree and the late Eliot Smith, "Thumbsucker" is a worthy addition to the growing subgenre of seventies-influenced coming of age films. Linus van Pelt would approve.

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2/2	The 40-Year-Old Virgin	\$7.9/\$82.3
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4/3	The Constant Gardener	\$4.8/\$19.1
5/4	Red Eye	\$4.6/\$51.3
6/0	The Man	\$4.0/\$4.0
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