

## *Thank You For Smoking: An Overlooked Classic*

Within the movie industry, hundreds of films are released each year making it impossible for one person to see every movie out there. Thanks to word of mouth and marketing, certain films rise to the top of public consciousness and the box office, while others are mostly ignored and quickly forgotten. Unfortunately, this means a lot of high-quality, entertaining films get overlooked during their original release. *Thank You For Smoking* was one of those films. Released in 2006, the film was the now-prominent, Academy Award nominated director Jason Reitman's directorial debut. While the film was by no means a financial failure, earning nearly \$25 million domestically, it comes nowhere close to his later releases, including *Juno* (\$143 million) and *Up in the Air* (\$84 million). This is a shame, because his first work is definitely just as good as, if not better than, his newer films. *Thank You For Smoking* is a hilariously politically-incorrect, satirical black comedy skewering anything in its path, but focusing mainly on lobbyists and media exploitation. "Michael Jordan plays ball. Charles Manson kills people. I talk. Everyone has a talent." With those words, the hero and narrator of this story, Nick Naylor, is perfectly summed up. Naylor, played to perfection by the charming Aaron Eckhart (*In The Company of Men*, *The Dark Knight*), is the face of cigarettes, the self-described "Colonel Sanders of nicotine." He represents the tobacco industry as a lobbyist/spin-doctor whose job it is to improve the public's view of cigarettes. He is incredibly skilled in his rhetoric, winning the sympathies and favor of an entire crowd opposed to him in an early scene despite the obviously dangerous effects of tobacco. He meets for lunch with the other two thirds of his M.O.D. squad, standing for Merchants of Death, who represent the alcohol and gun industries. Together they argue for bragging rights about whose product claims the most victims each year. Naylor's company, the Academy of Tobacco Studies, is worried that cigarettes are starting to lose their cool and soon plans to reintroduce smoking to the movies, where cigarettes had long ago been limited to "psychopaths or Europeans." Meanwhile, an up and coming reporter (Katie Holmes) is interested in doing an in depth story on Naylor, and a stuffy anti-tobacco activist senator from Vermont (William H. Macy) is going to extreme lengths to implement a new poison sticker on cigarette packs. This and more, such as a kidnapping and near-death experience, all end up colliding throughout the story in perfect, hilarious and biting ways. And if comedy is not your thing, there is also a pretty sweet, warming father-son relationship subplot that anchors the movie. The film, written and directed by Reitman, is adapted from Christopher Buckley's 1994 novel of the same name and its themes and ideas are possibly even more relevant today than they were when first published. It is excellently acted by a spectacular cast including, in addition to those mentioned above, Maria Bello, Adam Brody, Rob Lowe, Robert Duvall, J.K. Simmons, and Sam Elliot. It is confidently shot by Reitman with a style to it that is entirely unique, which is refreshing to see in a comedy. Its script is witty, pointed, and very clever. Even the soundtrack is pretty great. The film and Reitman never really pick sides or demonize anyone, but perhaps that is appropriate since neither side is really right. It's like Naylor says to his son at one point in the film: "That's the beauty of argument, if you argue correctly, you're never wrong." There is honestly no reason not to watch this movie, and it is a shame it got passed over originally. If you want an evening full of side-splitting laughter and an interesting look into the art of "spin", look no further than *Thank You For Smoking*.

