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"Here is a satire both savage and elegant, a dagger instead of a shotgun. Thank You for Smoking targets the pro-smoking lobby with a dark appreciation of human nature."  
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## movies BY JASON BLAIR

Katie Holmes is mesmerized by Aaron Eckhart's profile.



# Spin Doctor

Selling tobacco to the public.

**THANK YOU FOR SMOKING:** Written and directed by Jason Reitman. Based on the novel by Christopher Buckley. Produced by David O. Sacks. Cinematography, James Whitaker. Music, Rolfe Kent. Starring Aaron Eckhart, Maria Bello, Cameron Bright, Adam Brody, Sam Elliot, Katie Holmes, David Koechner, Rob Lowe, William H. Macy, J.K. Simmons and Robert Duvall. Fox Searchlight, 2006. R. 92 minutes.

Product placement is a thriving enterprise in Hollywood. Cereal boxes stand proudly on kitchen tables. Soda cans grin seductively into the camera. One recent show, HBO's "Big Love," feels at times like a cross between "My Three Wives" and QVC. But what if the product is cigarettes? What kind of person makes sure that more celebrities are smoking on film? In *Thank You for Smoking*, the fine new satire from Jason Reitman, that person is Nick Naylor (Aaron Eckhart), the "Colonel Sanders of Nicotine."

Nick is Big Tobacco's ace lobbyist, a job that ensures he has very few friends. Early in the movie, Nick visits his son's classroom for career day. His son Joey (Cameron Bright) implores him, "Please don't ruin my childhood." Nick's ex-wife calls him Joey's "weekend guardian." Imagine how Nick's enemies feel.

What with tobacco's current "health issues," Nick is a busy guy. A Vermont senator (William H. Macy) is urging Congress to label all cigarette packs as poison. Nick, who plans to testify at the hearings, visits the Captain (Robert Duvall), the benevolent dictator of the tobacco industry. The Captain sends Nick to California to meet Jeff Megall (Rob Lowe), a superagent for brokering product placements. Nick wants to put the "sex back in cigarettes." Jeff suggests a post-coital smoke aboard a space station in the upcoming film *Sector 6*. The cost? Twenty-five million.

Satisfied, Nick then delivers hush money to Lorne Lutch (Sam Elliot), the original Marlboro Man now dying of lung cancer. Lutch is edgy and broken, and only the presence of Joey keeps Nick from getting assaulted. As Joey eavesdrops, Nick convinces Lutch — a principled man, and a leading opponent of tobacco — to take the money. Nick's pitch is so richly layered that you aren't sure who he's representing, Lutch or the tobacco companies. Either way, it's beau-

tiful to watch. And in Joey, a lobbyist is born. Throughout the movie, there's a weary acceptance of who Nick is, a skilled rogue who can justify anything. Can he change? Will he? It's hard not to expect some kind of transformation (and ultimately redemption) for Nick. But *Thank You for Smoking* doesn't play to expectations. It isn't concerned with redeeming a lost soul. Instead, it's a movie about sticking to what you do best, even when what you do involves health risks.

Nick's fortunes eventually take a turn. Among other indignities, he's creatively tortured in a way you could only call appropriate. But it's Joey you worry about, not Nick, who seems to be almost bullet-proof. That's a weakness of the film, and although minor, it's

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worth mentioning: For all his singular talents of persuasion, Nick can appear indistinct at times. Is he himself, or an extension of Big Tobacco? Following his testimony before Congress (which is, of course, superb), Nick must decide where to go from here. His decision isn't as profound as it should be because the scene doesn't remind us what makes him different from his employers.

Otherwise, this is a notable movie, and a strong addition to recent American political comedies like *Bullworth* and *Wag the Dog*. Leading a sturdy, Altman-esque cast, Eckhart makes a star turn here by underplaying Nick. He might be the Sultan of Spin, but every day is just another day at the office. Some things never change.

*Thank You for Smoking* opens Friday, April 14 at the Bijou. **EW**

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<b>SCARY MOVIE 4 PG13</b> 12:10, 1:10, 1:45, 2:35, 3:35, 4:10, 5:05, 6:25, 7:05, 7:35, 8:50, 9:30, 10:05	<b>SHE'S THE MAN PG13</b> 12:40, 7:40
<b>BENCH WARMERS PG13</b> 11:55, 1:25, 2:40, 4:05, 5:10, 7:00, 7:30, 9:25, 9:55	<b>FAILURE TO LAUNCH PG13</b> 3:25, 10:25
<b>TAKE THE LEAD PG13</b> 12:55, 1:35, 3:50, 4:25, 6:45, 7:20, 9:40, 10:15	
<b>LUCKY NUMBER SLEVIN R</b> 1:20, 4:15, 7:35, 10:25	
<b>ICE AGE 2 PG</b> 12:00, 12:15, 12:45, 1:55, 2:30, 2:55, 3:20, 4:30, 5:00, 5:30, 6:30, 7:00, 7:30, 8:00, 9:00, 9:30, 10:00, 10:30	
<b>INSIDE MAN R</b> 11:50, 3:15, 6:55, 10:05	

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<b>AQUAMARINE PG</b> [11:50] 2:25, 4:55, 7:25, 9:50	<b>NANNY MCPHEE PG</b> [11:40] 2:05, 4:30
<b>GLORY ROAD PG</b> [11:15] 2:00, 4:50, 7:30, 10:15	<b>HOODWINKED PG</b> 2:35, 4:45, 6:55
<b>DATE MOVIE PG13</b> [12:15] 2:20, 4:40, 6:50, 9:20	<b>DOOGAL G</b> [11:20], 9:15
<b>CURIOUS GEORGE G</b> [12:05] 2:10, 4:25, 7:10, 9:35	<b>FIREWALL PG13</b> [11:45] 2:30, 5:00, 7:35, 10:00
<b>MEMOIRS OF A GEISHA PG13</b> 7:00, 10:05	<b>CASANOVA R</b> [12:10] 2:50, 7:40, 10:10
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