



TICKLED CO-DIRECTOR DAVID FARRIER (LEFT) OBSERVES THE WEIRDNESS OF 'COMPETITIVE ENDURANCE TICKLING'

IT'S NOT FUNNY ANYMORE

In *Tickled*, journalist David Farrier exposes the wealth, power and abuse behind a bizarre Internet fetish

“I started this journey curious about a bizarre sport called competitive endurance tickling,” says New Zealand journalist David Farrier near the conclusion of his strange and upsetting documentary *Tickled*. “But I now think this was never even about tickling. This is about power, control and harassment. It’s about one person’s twistedness and how far that can go.”

Co-directed by Farrier and videographer Dylan Reeve, *Tickled* is funny for about five minutes before it veers off into an unnerving odyssey that leads the filmmakers down the hermetic, perverted corridors of money and corruption. At first, when Farrier happens upon his first tickling website — in which hunky young straight guys are bound, piled upon and tickled by other hunky guys — he is bemused and, yes, curious.

He decides to pursue the story. It doesn’t take long, however, before he hits the wall: Farrier is contacted by the site’s representative and told that, because he’s homosexual, they’d rather he didn’t bring bad publicity upon their harmless entertainment. The harder he pushes, the more vicious becomes the pushback, until he’s called a “faggot” and threatened with legal action.

Tickled is one of the most bizarre and creepy documentaries I’ve seen in a long time, and the less I say about the details of the story, the better; it seems that every five minutes or so, a new revelation is cracked open, sending Farrier on increasingly alarming and distressing tangents — the results are like getting trapped in some sadistic, crypto-fascist hall of mirrors where money, lawyers and blackmailers operate with absolute impunity, dealing destruction willy-nilly for the sole satisfaction of one person’s oddball fetish.

It’s an old story — camels and needle-eyes and all that — and yet, for all its timeless familiarity, the vile egotism and omniscient control of the filthy rich never stops being compelling, confusing and frustrating when brought to the light of day. What’s fascinating about *Tickled* is not the fetish at its core, a seemingly harmless yen to make another person squirm and squeak in orgasmic ambivalence, but the lengths to which someone will go to satisfy that urge.

As Farrier pursues an increasingly elusive and recalcitrant truth, receiving dire threats all along the way, we witness the ways power and money function when confronted by the people harmed: Deny, lie, deflect and threaten. By the time he peels back the curtained layers of deceit covering an international operation of tickling voyeurism, Farrier seems almost disappointed to find that the person pulling the levers is such an insipid and sad homunculus — like some closeted, self-loathing Wizard of Oz hiding behind myriad false identities and an endless assault of bigoted, abusive mumbo-jumbo.

“It’s all family money,” Farrier says at one point of the perpetrator’s wealth. Indeed. Money is as money does, and I suspect that, behind closed doors, the rich have always indulged in whatever the fuck excesses they want to without a care in the world for who or what they damage. In this way, *Tickled* is simply a modern, real-life updating of movies ranging from *Citizen Kane* to Pasolini’s *Salò* to the more recent *Foxcatcher*. Yet, lurking beneath the surface of *Tickled* is a subtle cautionary message about this scary new age we’re caught in, wherein the worldwide web has become the new gothic dungeon, and victimization can go global with a spontaneity that is impossible to halt. The hallways of power are now digital, and no one is safe — especially, as usual, the poor and dispossessed young, willing to be kootchi-kooed for a few bucks. (*Broadway Metro*) ■

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WED 12:30 2:45 10:00
THU 12:30 2:45 5:30 7:45 10:00

THE ONES BELOW
9:30 PM

MAGGIE'S PLAN
12:30 2:50 5:10 7:30 9:50

THE LOBSTER
1:40 4:20 7:00 9:40

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12:40 5:00

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