

THE BEAVER

**A Summit Entertainment / Participant Media Presentation
An Anonymous Content / Imagenation Abu Dhabi FZ Production
A Jodie Foster Film**

Film reviewed by Franco P. Visser

Walter Black (played by two-time Oscar winner Mel Gibson) is a struggling husband and unsuccessful executive of Jerry Co., a toy company on the verge of bankruptcy. He suffers from severe depression and the usual treatment avenues of therapy and medication have failed him. Kicked out by his wife Meredith (played by two-time Oscar winner Jodie Foster), Walter is forced to head to a hotel for accommodation. Full of alcohol and with his life hanging by a thread, Walter decides to commit suicide as he does not see his way out of his despair. What he attempts is a full-hearted yet incredibly foolish stunt, and it leaves him unconscious on the floor of his hotel room. Death 0 - Walter 1. When Walter finally comes round he takes out the trash caused by his unsuccessful suicide attempt, and in the dumpster outside the hotel he finds a beaver hand puppet. There is an immediate bond between Walter and the beaver, and Walter 'employs' the beaver as his mentor and means of communication with the outside world. When he arrives at the family home he informs Meredith that the hand puppet is part of the treatment programme that his Psychiatrist prescribed. What the hand puppet does for Walter is astounding, and he soon turns his failing toy company into a money generating giant.

Unfortunately for Walter the success that he achieves with his family, especially with Meredith and their youngest son, Henry (played by Riley Thomas Stewart) is short-lived. Meredith soon finds out that the beaver was not a treatment prescription from Walter's Psychiatrist, and Walter's inability to let go of the hand puppet, even in intimate situations, causes a further rift between the couple.

Walter and Meredith's eldest son, Porter (played by Anton Yelchin of Star Trek fame) has a very strained and difficult relationship with Walter, and the young man tries his best to avoid any similarities that he might have with his dad. Porter keeps track of similarities that he shares with his father through sticking up post-it notes in his bedroom, and he realises to his horror that he and his father share many similar mannerisms and characteristics. Like father, like son. Porter's school performance takes a knock when it is discovered that he wrote several of his fellow student's papers as a money-making scheme. The film portrays the young man's struggle to accept his family's circumstances, more specifically his struggle with his father's illness and behaviour.



In contrast to Walter's challenging relationship with Porter, Walter's relationship with Henry blossoms with Henry thoroughly enjoying the beaver being part of the family set-up. Walter and Henry bond with each other through Walter's use of the hand puppet as means of communication and growth. Walter and Henry seem to share a passion for woodwork, and soon the beaver inspires Walter to create a very successful range of toys – The Beaver Building Kits for children. The success for Jerry Co. is also short-lived, as the beaver hand-puppet cause interference in all Walter's interpersonal interactions, at work and at home. Meredith leaves the house with both children, and Walter now has to confront his demons on his own, with the beaver in tow.

What started out as a brilliant and very creative means for Walter to reconnect with his life- and the world - ends up as a complete disaster, and Walter disintegrates totally ending up in a psychiatric facility where he and the beaver part ways in a rather disturbing manner. It seems that Walter's struggle with severe depression became inter-mixed with delusions in part assisted by his 'friend' the beaver, and his breakdown is spectacular. It is only at the end of the film where a rather pathetic Walter, whilst under psychiatric care, is able to start redefining and re-establishing his relationships with his significant other and more specifically the troubled relationship with Porter.

The film *The Beaver* is brilliantly directed by Jodie Foster, and Mel Gibson's all-out acting in the role of a troubled and humiliated former executive is to be commended. In addition to the film portraying the struggle of a severely depressed individual, it also takes the viewer through what it must be like for the family members of those struggling with the debilitating disease that is Major Depression. The rollercoaster path of the illness and the resultant family dynamics are clear to see and excellently portrayed. What struck me was the potential therapeutic potential of using hand puppets for an individual suffering from a mental illness. Hand puppets have been used with great success in working with children, and the use of hand puppets in adults might be a consideration, but under controlled and monitored circumstances. *The Beaver* is a must see film. Best wishes for a very peaceful and merry festive season to all the readers.