

Billy The Kid [2007, Movie]

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Billy The Kid: Review ▶



★★★★

Jennifer Venditti's documentary profile of 15-year-old Kiss fan Billy is truly something special: a portrait of a so-called "troubled" teenager who's making his way through the treacherous world of adolescence as best he can, and doing it with such unusual intelligence and sensitivity that he becomes an unlikely role model and even something of a hero.

Venditti first met Billy when she was casting photographer Carter Smith's attention-grabbing short film *Bugcrush*, and with all the acumen of a natural-born documentary filmmaker, she knew she'd found a great subject. Billy was the kid the popular crowd targeted for "fun," and in the small, largely working-class Maine town of Lisbon Falls, Billy was an easy target. As Billy himself puts it, he's sometimes "at war with himself." The right combination of meds — and the infinite patience of his loving mother and stepfather, whom Billy adores — can keep those inner battles at bay. But with his slightly disconcerting, wide-eyed stare, rabbitlike lope and inability to interact with strangers with natural ease, Billy remains an outsider and has gained a certain perspective from the arm's length at which he's held. "I know I'm unique," he admits. "I don't let it go to my head." In other respects, Billy is a lot like other kids his age. He sports a nascent pony tail and can often be seen returning from karate practice still in his white cotton *gi* and proudly wearing his purple belt. Billy likes "alternative" music and heavy metal — AC/DC, Aerosmith and, above all, Kiss. He also likes girls but tries not to be a jerk about it. He really hates terrorism and politics, and holds dear the wisdom of *TERMINATOR 2*: "There is no fate but what we make for ourselves." Billy also fantasizes about being a superhero, saving the innocent, fighting the guilty and maybe winning over a damsel. He thinks he's found that damsel in Heather, a 16-year-old waitress who works at her family's Italian restaurant, and their courtship becomes the focus of this extraordinary film.

Venditti follows Billy over the course of several months as he moves through his world with surprising chivalry and graciousness, even when the world appears cruel and unfair: Billy is unfailingly polite to his elders, never misses an opportunity to say something complimentary and remains true to his strict moral code — "It's a sin to hurt women, real or fake" — even when it comes to video games. Venditti doesn't shy away from the reality of Billy's emotional condition: Not every day in his special-education classes goes well, and Billy himself describes how he once tried to stab his abusive father with a steak knife. But this "dark side" only adds to the larger sense of Billy as an individual for whom each day is a small triumph. In the end, Bill emerges as someone truly unique and someone who we feel privileged to know. —Ken Fox