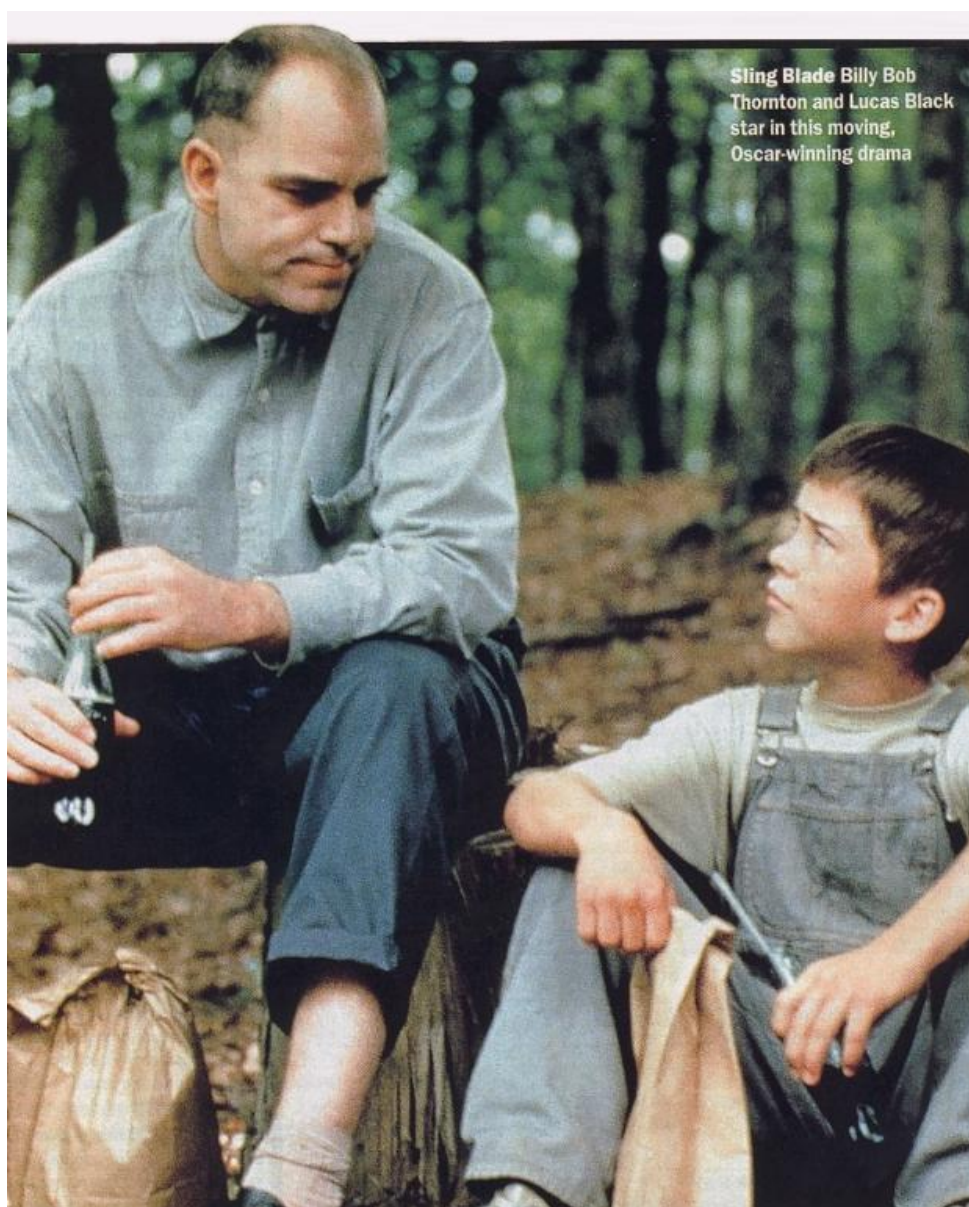


Sling Blade

US : 1996 : dir. Billy Bob Thornton : : 134 min
 prod: : scr: Billy Bob Thornton : dir.ph.:
[Lucas Black](#)
 Billy Bob Thornton; Dwight Yoakam; J.T. Walsh; John Ritter; Natalie Canerday; Rick Dial;
 James Hampton; Robert Duvall; Jim Jarmusch

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω 8 € M ♀	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
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Adversity makes strange bedfellows – or friends at any rate

Source: Radio Times

Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide
2001 review:

"Fascinating portrait of a mentally deficient man sprung from prison twenty years after killing his mother and her boyfriend; now he attempts to blend into "real life", helped by a boy who befriends him. Incredibly controlled performance by Thornton (who also wrote and directed) anchors this long but rewarding tale, which leads to a somewhat inevitable finale. Young Black is exceptional as Thornton's new friend, country singer Yoakam is first-rate as a short-fused bully, and Ritter is terrific in a most unusual part. Oscar-winner for Best Screenplay Adaptation: based on the short film **"SOME CALL IT A SLING BLADE"**. ***1/2 "

Radio Times review:

"Arkansas-born Billy Bob Thornton has made a career out of playing hick simpletons (**"U-TURN"**, **"A SIMPLE PLAN"**) and subverting that stereotype by playing hick geniuses (**"ARMAGEDDON"**, **"PUSHING TIN"**). Naturally, he is no fool, as this stunning 1996 feature directorial debut proves. His tender screenplay won him an Oscar and his brilliantly-judged performance as the child-like Karl Childers (for which he received an Oscar nomination) really put him on the acting map.

Karl has been institutionalised for 25 years, having killed his mother and her lover in a fit of rage at the age of 12. ("I just seen red," he explains in the film's opening monologue).

The sling blade, or scythe, of the title was his murder weapon. But now he has been released back into Arkansas society, where – bewildered by such tasks as knocking on a door – he befriends a young boy, Frank (Lucas Black, familiar from his very similar role in TV series **"American Gothic"**), and his mother, Linda (Natalie Canerday). Though Karl is apparently benign now, you fear for Linda, who has an abusive boyfriend [*sic*], played by country singer Dwight Yoakam.

Though occasionally saccharine, this is a moving film – so much more human in its treatment of the subject than, say **"FORREST GUMP"** – and is anything but depressing, despite Karl's terrible past, told in flashback. When he eats his first ever French fries your heart will be in your mouth. **** "

"Drama directed, written by and starring Billy Bob Thornton. Having killed his mother and her lover when he was 12, Karl Childers is eventually released back into the community after years in a mental institution. As he starts to make a new life for himself, Karl befriends a young boy, Frank Wheatley. Widescreen ****"

Comparisons with the inexplicably over-rated **"FORREST GUMP"** are very telling. Whereas that film left this reviewer for one with the uncomfortable sensation it was mocking its own central figure (Tom Hanks, who won the Best Actor Oscar for it), **"SLING BLADE"** errs if anything on the other side – only one person in the whole film, who is clearly flagged as the Bad Guy, mocks and taunts the central figure as a "retard". The script is somewhat ambiguous about Karl's mental capacities. His conversation is very simple, he is awkward and ungainly in his gait and manner, but he reads people shrewdly enough, and can repair lawnmowers and washing machines with a matter-of-fact confidence. In one scene, after a gay friend of the family he's staying with has poured his soul out to Karl at a diner, and then asks what Karl is thinking about, Karl makes some stultifyingly asinine remark about the food he's eating. But if he's more of a simpleton than Dustin Hoffman in **"RAIN MAN"** (who also won the Best Actor Oscar for it), his is a simplicity which reveals the buffoonery of some of the "normal" lives and attitudes he encounters. His character has a gruff, phlegmatic dignity about it which defies the audience to feel pity for him, and it's an excellent, entirely convincing performance by Thornton. Full review pending.

Horace, Digging to China, To Kill a Mockingbird, Lawnmower Man

See subject index under **DISABLED / HANDICAPPED** and **SPECIAL FRIENDSHIPS**