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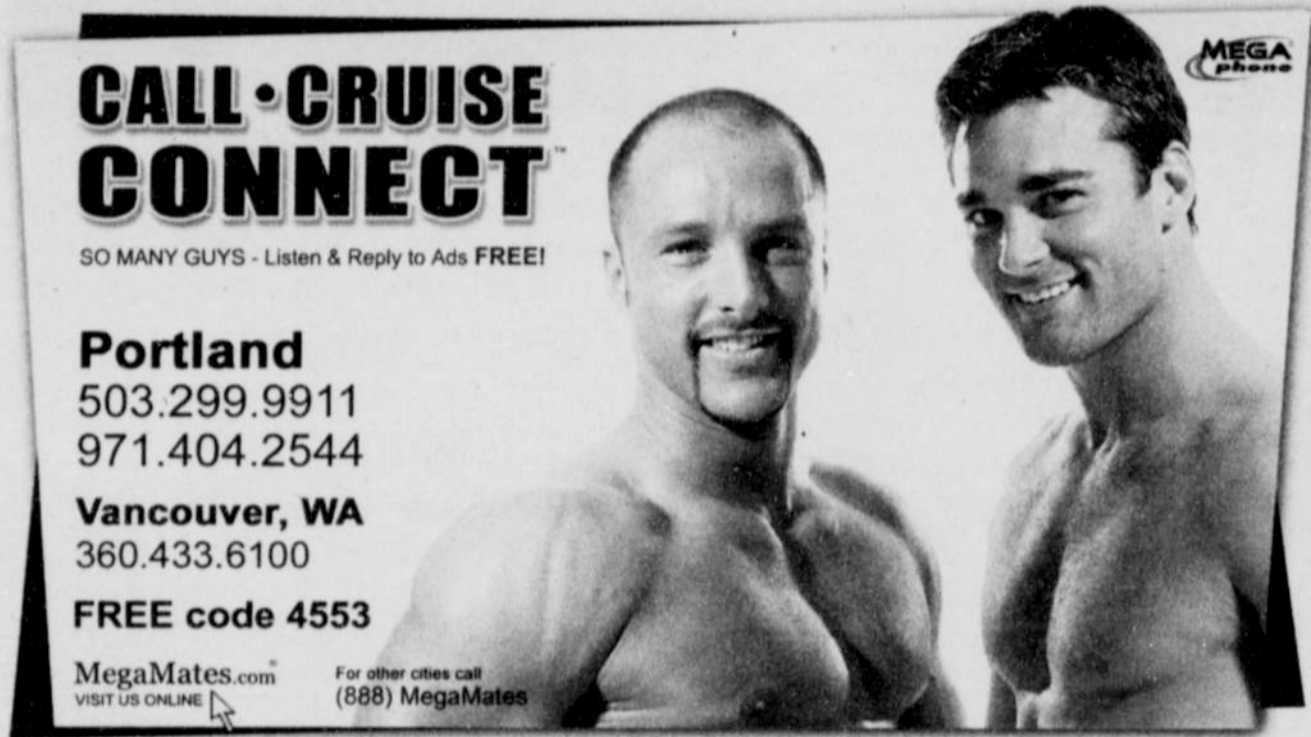
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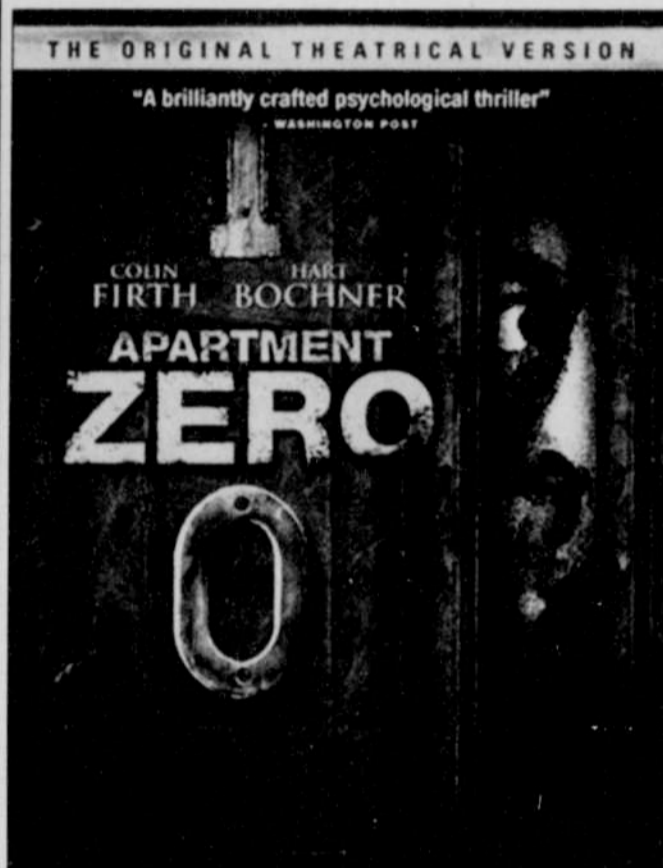


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film
Bad Boys

A bisexual interloper, a notorious reparative therapist and an online serial killer terrorize queers on DVD

by Gary Morris



Apartment Zero

This twisted, gay-inflected melodrama set (and shot) in Buenos Aires in the late 1980s caused a splash when it first appeared, winning numerous festival awards and gaining a rep as one of best indies of its time. The worry with such films is that they might not hold up, particularly 19 years later when, cinematically, some of the same themes have been recycled so often that what seemed shocking then feels merely routine now.

Happily, such is not the case with *Apartment Zero*. Colin Firth plays Adrian LeDuc, a priggish, nervous, repressed cinema club owner. When not screening James Dean movies for a handful of devotees, he visits his shriekingly insane mother in the madhouse. Poor attendance at his cinema forces him to interview boarders for his luxurious apartment (actually mom's). Enter hunky, seductive Jack Carney (Hart Bochner). Adrian moves Jack in and quickly starts to resemble a beleaguered wife, begging to launder Jack's dirty underwear, feeding him and generally pleading for any emotional crumbs Mysterious Hunkey Boy wants to throw his way.

In the tradition of many a bisexual interloper from movies past (think *Teorema* or *Something for*

Everyone), Jack has got a little something for each of Adrian's nosy neighbors. He enchants two old widows over tea and gives plenty of deep sympathy to both a lonely housewife and a pompous drag queen down the hall. Adrian can't manage such things; he hates everybody in his building and demands, like a shrewish wife, that Jack stop seeing them.

Meanwhile, Buenos Aires is under siege by a serial killer whose M.O. is suspiciously like that of the infamous Argentinian death squads of the 1970s. Could Jack be behind these grisly killings, or is Adrian as crazy as his mother? Or both? Or neither?

Apartment Zero has so many plot twists it might leave some viewers dizzy, but those who hang in for the full 124-minute running time will be well rewarded. Firth and Bochner, always a treat for the eyes, excel in their respective roles of obsessive emotional wreck and charismatic chameleon, each engaged in a delicate dance of survival with the other. The gallery of wacky neighbors amuses and disturbs at the same time, and even gorehounds get fed with several bloody tableaux. The queer angle is refreshingly complex here. The DVD restores seven minutes cut from most prints, including several steamy moments between our bad boys.

Fixing Frank

More bad boys appear in the 2002 talkfest *Fixing Frank*, but they could hardly be further from the engaging neurotics of *Apartment Zero*. The title character (Andrew Elvis Miller) appears as the film opens talking to a shrink about being a troubled homosexual. The shrink is Dr. Apsey, a notorious reparative therapist type. As it happens, Frank is not quite the confused queen he portrays; in fact, he's a gay journalist who's gone undercover, at the behest of his domineering lover, Jonathan (Paul Provenza), who's also a therapist, to expose Dr. Apsey as a charlatan who should have his license revoked.

Unfortunately, lying is not one of Frank's high points, and before you know it, he's blabbing the truth to Dr. Apsey (whom Jonathan calls "Frankenstein"). Apsey in turn seems to take the opportunity to play a lot of mind games with the impressionable Frank, who also appears to be victimized in this area by his domineering lover. The film at this point becomes a power struggle between

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What's an issue of *Just Out* without a picture of Poison Waters?

Hopefully we'll never have to find out!

Happy New Year!