



Stuck inside a phone booth, Stu (Colin Farrell) is threatened by an enraged pimp (John Enos).

TWENTIETH CENTURY FOX, 2003

## Ring! Ring!

Anybody there?

**PHONE BOOTH:** Directed by Joel Schumacher. Written by Larry Cohen. Produced by Gil Netter, David Zucker. Executive producer, Ted Kurdyia. Cinematography, Matthew Libatique. Production design, Andrew Laws. Film Editor, Mark Stevens. Costumes, Daniel Orlandi. Music, Harry Gregson-Williams. Starring Colin Farrell, Kiefer Sutherland and Forest Whitaker, with Radha Mitchell, Katie Holmes., Paula Jai Parker and John Enos. 20th Century Fox, 2003. 81 minutes. R.

A freaky, one-act sideshow takes place in a mid-Manhattan phone booth, surrounded by pimps, prostitutes, passersby and police. Joel Schumacher directs this quickie, shot in fewer than 12 days with a scrumpy budget and currently hot Irish actor Colin Farrell in nearly every scene. But the story is the brainchild of pulp writer Larry Cohen, whose cheap horror flicks include *Invasion of Privacy* (1996) and *Misbegotten* (1997), for which the website Rotten Tomatoes fails to find even foreign reviews.

The premise is so simple that if you've seen the trailer (and who hasn't?), you've seen the movie. Stu Shepard (Farrell) is a ruthless, inflated New York publicist, who dresses in spendy Italian suits and shoots the breeze with gossip columnists and pimp rock stars. Stu conducts his business via cell phone and his monkey business from the phone booth. Same time, every day.

One afternoon he calls his side dish, Pamela (Katie Holmes), but before he gets out of the booth, the phone rings, and he picks up. A man's voice on the other end (Kiefer Sutherland) flays him for being a sorry sleaze who cheats on his wife, Kelly (Radha Mitchell). He proposes that Stu tell Kelly the whole truth about his relationship with Pamela, because right now the caller's looking at Stu through the sights of his rifle. So if Stu hangs up or leaves the phone booth, he's toast.

From this point on, a deadly cat-and-mouse game ensues between these men, both of whom come off as arrogant, know-everything jerks. If that's appealing, you're going to like this movie a lot. If it's not, you're going to be bored out of your mind in about another 10, 15 minutes. That's when the police arrive, and Captain Ramey (Forest Whitaker) begins to reason with Stu to come out with his hands up.

Now by himself Ramey might have served as an adequate foil for the deadly

competition going on within the closed-circuit phone talk, but instead he is hassled by a loud-mouthed, know-it-all police interrogator, a dude who galls this viewer more than either Stu the asshole or the warped caller. So now we have three out-of-control, rival egos scrambling for dominance, and none of them worth spending two minutes with. Boring.

Part of my phonic dis-connect from the ongoing melodrama is Sutherland's voice. Because I watch "24," I kept hearing the authoritative dulcet tones of intelligence agent Jack Bauer of CTU, the Counter-Terrorist Unit, and wondering why Jack would be

# BORING

killing or threatening to kill people for moral ineptitude. Granted, such ethical lack is to be found at self-important levels of show biz, but why target this pip-squeak womanizer? He's whiney and pathetic but not dangerous. Then I'd remember I wasn't watching TV; this was a movie that I'd paid \$4.75 to watch. Then I was pissed.

The movie has a few thrilling moments when it seems that a pimp with a grudge (John Enos) will actually break into the phone booth with a baseball bat and dispatch Stu himself. Earlier Stu had blown off an edgy prostitute (Paula Jai Parker), who wanted the phone to call clients, and now this flashy muscle-man has come to protect her good name. The pimp gets his comeuppance when the sniper takes him out, but his girls wail that Stu killed him. That's the situation when the police arrive, the conundrum Stu and the captain must sort out before Stu gets himself shot by the NYPD.

The best thing about this movie is that it only lasts 81 minutes. Other than that and Forest Whitaker, I can't think of a strong reason to recommend it. Now playing at Cinema World and Cinemark. **EW**

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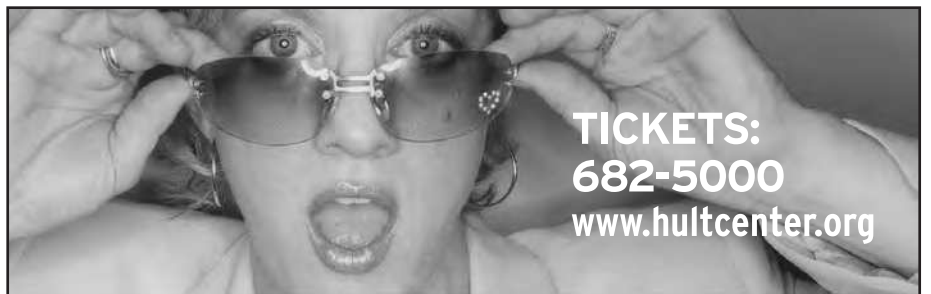


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