

## Phone Booth

Another one of those gritty New York movies filmed elsewhere (actually shot in LA)--*Phone Booth* is a pulse-pounding thriller where a sniper/serial killer with a God-complex (one of those guys again) threatens cold blooded assassinations unless a glib PR man remains on the phone with him and confesses his moral failings.

The extremely hot Colin Farrell (*The Recruit*, *Daredevil*) is the PR guy, Stu Shepard, a fast-talking, super-slick, hustling public relations guy angling to be an agent to the rich and famous, a Brooklyn lad aiming for the uptown life and double-dealing a mile a minute to get there. The film introduces us to Stu as he cruises Broadway with a nerdy gofer and two cell phones at the ready, dispensing lies and gambits to get his clients noticed. This sequence, done on the run with the fluent Farrell (and actually shot near Times Square), is a stunning introduction, in mere minutes, to the world of striving Stu.

The guy practically lives on his cell, so why does he go to 8th Avenue to use a phone booth? The booth is where he encounters the disembodied voice of the sniper (Kiefer Sutherland), who threatens to kill him--or random bystanders--unless the killer is satisfied that Stu has "atoned." The trick of keeping Stu on the phone is handled well; after all, why doesn't the guy just hang up and walk away? But you can understand why as Stu gets hooked by a voice that knows all about him and his secrets then holds him by threatening to kill others.

When a murder does occur, Stu is blamed for it, the police show up--led by Captain Ed Ramey (Forest Whitaker)--and tension escalates. It turns out Stu's sin is his interest in Pamela (Katie Holmes), a budding actress with whom he was communicating without the knowledge of his wife Kelly (Radha Mitchell). And how was he communicating? Via the phone booth, where his calls could not be traced. He must then struggle to balance the nut on the phone (constantly playing mind games), the police who may want to take him down, and his two women, both of whom show up in the increasingly circus-like atmosphere surrounding the booth.

Director Joel Schumacher is a New Yorker by birth and a Hollywood veteran by profession who has dealt with the man-in-extremis before (*Falling Down*, *A Time to Kill*). *Phone Booth* is in that spirit; it's a loud, manic, fairly brazen entertainment, but it does entertain, mainly because it keeps the focus very pointed (the guy in the booth--will he or won't he be shot *dead?*), because it contrasts nail-biting pressure with the somber presence of Mr. Whitaker, and because Colin Farrell is compulsively watchable. The actor even attains some dignity when, with the sniper's urging, he struggles through a public confession which may just be a life-changing moment.

(*The film is rated "R" for some violence and rough language.*)

(April 2003)