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Bulletproof Monk
Odeon Magdalen St until Thurs May 1st

In 1986, 'The Golden Child' was a Tibet-meets-West comedy fantasy which exploited the talents of comic du jour Eddie Murphy. Today the similar 'Bulletproof Monk' exploits the comic appeal of Seann William Scott ('American Pie', 'Road Trip', 'Dude, Where's My Car?'), but it also draws on the recent popularity of martial arts epic 'Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon' and its star Chow Yun-Fat.

In Tibet in 1943 the Monk with No Name (Yun-Fat) protects the 'scroll of the ultimate' from Nazi officer Strucker (Karel Roden), and makes a miraculous escape. Sixty years later, in America, the Monk, whose youth has been magically preserved by the scroll, becomes convinced that Seann William Scott's pickpocket Kar (as in 'Dude, where's my...?') is destined to be the next protector of the scroll. At first Kar seems more interested in courting Bad Girl (Jamie King), until Strucker, now elderly and wheelchair-bound, but still ruthlessly evil, forces Kar to confront his destiny and kick some Nazi ass.

Amidst all the impossible stuntwire leaping and bullet dodging, there's one sleight of hand which this film manages to pull off with particular cunning: by skipping from 1943 to 2003, it leaves the impression that Tibet's problems begin and end with World War II German National Socialism - conveniently glossing over half a century of subsequent Chinese occupation and repression. There was a time - 1997 to be precise - when Hollywood was only too happy to criticise China in general ('Red Corner') and its treatment of the Tibetans in particular ('Kundun', 'Seven Years in Tibet'); but now that the US has conferred Most Favoured Nation status on China, apparently the magic of cinema can make the whole sorry tale of Sino-Tibetan relations simply disappear.

Still, I found 'Bulletproof Monk' to be surprisingly entertaining. A charming on-screen rapport develops between Yun-Fat, who, with over eighty films to his name, is as much an old master as the character he plays, and Scott, who is the perfect young apprentice, not yet on his teacher's level but full of potential. The film's comic book origins are reflected in its absurdly old-school antagonists, Strucker and his granddaughter Nina (Victoria Smurfit), Nazis who have exchanged the goose-step for the martial arts high-kick. The action set-pieces are impressive, but best of all is the knowing script (by Ethan Reiff and Cyrus Nowrasteh), which never takes too seriously the sub-Yoda cryptic mumbo jumbo it gives the Monk to utter.

Better than expected.
Anton Bitel, 19.04.03

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Phone Booth
Odeon George St until Thurs May 1st

'Phone Booth' has been kept on hold for a long time. Written years ago by Larry Cohen, the grand master of quality B-grade such as 'Q, the Winged Serpent', the 'Maniac Cop' series, the 'It's Alive' series, and various episodes of 'Columbo'; shot by Joel Schumacher in late 2000, then reshot with Kiefer Sutherland replacing Ron Eldard as the narrator, and with filming delayed by Sutherland's commitments to '24'; then shelved when the Washington D.C. sniper attacks proved too close for comfort; then held back even longer to allow star Colin Farrell to gain a more public profile from his other projects ('The Recruit', 'Daredevil').

Still, the wait has been well worth it, as 'Phone Booth' is a taut, paranoia-inducing thriller that does for public telephone facilities what 'Psycho' did for showers. Set almost entirely in and around a phone booth on 53rd and 8th in New York, the film follows the trials of fast-talking, self-serving publicist Stu (Farrell) after he answers a ringing telephone. Soon he finds himself the pawn in a cruel game, where all the rules are dictated by the unseen but all-seeing sniper on the other end of the line.

Schumacher's history as a director has been very uneven, with estimable films like 'Falling Down' or 'Flatliners' overshadowed by worthless 'Batman' sequels, or by the almost comically terrible '8mm'. 'Phone Booth', however, is a real return to form, with Schumacher using every trick in the book to make his very confined setting remain interesting. Farrell skilfully portrays Stu in all his odiousness while still somehow engaging the film-goer's identification with him; and Forest Whitaker puts in yet another reliable performance as a police captain who manages to keep his head amidst all the mayhem.

The film's real main character, however is the mysterious all-seeing, all-knowing 'caller'. Looking down from on high, punishing sins, brooking no disobedience, demanding arbitrary sacrifices and smiting without mercy, he is a new version of the Old Testament God, transforming what would otherwise have been a fairly conventional cat-and-mouse thriller into a modern-day morality tale, where the phone book has replaced the bible.

As arresting as a ringing telephone - and with a theological twist. Brilliant.
Anton Bitel, 20.04.03

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CINEMA

Until Thurs 1st May

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THE JUNGLE BOOK 2 (U) Daily: 12.15, 2.15, 4.30, Thu: 12.15

Mowgli's back for more adventures
THE LITTLE POLAR BEAR (U) Fri - Sun: 11.45*
Enchanting children's animation from Germany
DREAMCATCHER(15) Daily: 1.00, 4.45, 8.00
Ravenous space worms... Wheelchair access Thu only
WELCOM TO COLLINWOOD (15) Fri - Wed: 1.45, 4.00, 6.45, 9.00

George Clooney in 'idiots try to conduct heist' scenario
THE RECRUIT (12A) Fri - Wed: 7.30
Al Pacino in CIA thriller. See review at dailyinfo.co.uk
PHONE BOOTH (15) Daily: 2.00*, 4.15*, 6.30*, 8.45*
Don't ever be bad... or don't ever answer the 'phone. See review at dailyinfo.co.uk No wheelchair access Thu
25TH HOUR(15) Daily: 1.30*, 5.00*, 8.15*

Spike Lee's latest: love it or hate it
HOW TO LOSE A GUY IN 10 DAYS (12A) Daily: 12.00, 2.45, 5.45, 8.30
...it's trickier when he's got a bet on making you fall in love with him
ODEON SENIOR SCREEN: MINORITY REPORT(12A) Wed: 10.45am*

Cruise on the run. Over 55s only!
JOHNNY ENGLISH (PG) Thu: 12.30, 3.00, 5.30, 7.45
Rowan Atkinson in spy spoof. See review at dailyinfo.co.uk

X-MEN 2 (12A) Thu: 1.15, 4.30, 7.45
They're, erm, back.

Odeon Magdalen Street
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SEEING DOUBLE (PG) Fri - Sun: 12.45, 3.15
Your favourite & mine - S Club in light-hearted musical adventure.
JOHNNY ENGLISH (PG) Fri - Wed: 12.30*, 3.00*, 5.30*, 8.15*

Rowan Atkinson in Bond spoof. See review at dailyinfo.co.uk
BULLET PROOF MONK (12A) Fri - Sun: 6.00, 8.30
Chow Yun-Fat training his unlikely US replacement. See review at dailyinfo.co.uk
X-MEN 2 (12A) Thu: 1.45*, 5.00*, 8.15*

They're, erm, back.
WELCOME TO COLLINWOOD (15) Thu: 1.45, 4.00, 6.45, 9.00

George Clooney in 'idiots try to conduct heist' scenario
Phoenix Picture House 512526
PUNCH DRUNK LOVE(15) Fri: 11.30pm
Sat: 5.00, 11.30pm Sun: 4.30

Adam Sandler surprises with a mature performance. See review at dailyinfo.co.uk
RUSSIAN ARK(U) Fri & Sun: 2.30, 6.45, 9.00 Sat: 7.00, 9.00 Mon: 2.30, 4.30 Tues: 2.30, 4.30, 9.00 Wed & Thu: 2.15, 6.45, 9.00
The history of the country, condensed into a dream-like 96 minutes.
METROPOLIS(PG) Fri: 4.20, 11.20pm Sat: 11.20pm Sun: 12noon

Silent sci-fi classic from 1927
LILJA 4-EVER (18) Daily: 2.00(not Sun & Mon), 4.15, 6.30, 8.45
The youth of Russia. See review at dailyinfo.co.uk
REVENGER'S TRAGEDY(15) Sun: 12.30
Mon: 2.00, 9.00 Tues: 6.45

Reworking of a play from 1607, from the director of 'Repo Man' & 'Sid and Nancy'.
KIDS CLUB: HARRY POTTER 2 (PG) Sun: Fun 1.15, film 2.00
The chamber of secrets. No unaccompanied muggles.
VOICE LE TEMPS DES ASSASSINS (CERT??) Mon: 6.45

Powerful french film noir.
BERGMAN: CRIES AND WHISPERS (15) Wed & Thu: 7.00
Check time with cinema
'Haunting & shattering'
Ultimate Picture Palace 245288

GOLDFINGER (PG) Fri - Mon: 7.00
Pussy Galore...
FRIDA (15) Fri & Mon: 9.15 Sat & Sun: 4.30, 9.15
Tues - Thu: 7.00
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AVALON(12) Tue - Thu : 9.30
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* = Wheelchair Access

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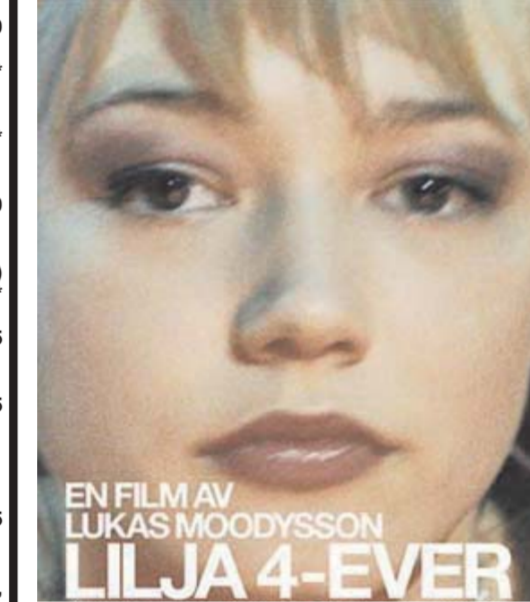


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CINEMA REVIEW



Phoenix Picture House until Thurs May 1st
If Lukas Moodysson's previous film, 'Together', showed how communal living can offer a shelter

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