

Movie Review

Flatliners - a look at the dark side

By GARRY J. MURDOCK

The Herald
Director Joel Schumacher has taken movie-goers into the dark side of life (perhaps death would be the most appropriate word) with his new movie Flatliners.

Producers Scott Rudin and Michael Rachmil knew Flatliners would be a hit before it even opened, which probably explains why almost every young star tried desperately to get casted for the picture. Not because it boasted mega-star Keifer Sutherland and relative newcomer Julia Roberts (who achieved fame in Pretty Woman) but because the movie dealt with an old topic (perhaps the oldest) in an entirely different way.

That topic was death and how five up-and-coming medical students decide to find the answer to it. And how do they find the answer? Quite simply, by killing each other. And then hoping they can bring each other back to life through modern technology.

The movie takes a different twist, however, from earlier films: No one came back in ghostly form, no one inhabited someone else's body and no one was sucked into a void of immense proportions.

Instead, writer Peter Filardi kept the movie as realistic as possible by exploring the depths of each student's psyche. Essentially, their own pasts.

What happens when they die, they soon discover, is that they are re-acquainted with their sins, some long since forgotten.

Unfortunately, much to the physical chagrin of Keifer Sutherland, the hauntings don't stop after their revivals. Each student slowly begins to realize (except one, played by Oliver Pratt who didn't have much desire to "flatline" his brain waves anyway) they must come to grips with each of their past mistakes if they are to ever live peacefully again.

Flatliners is frightening - no, the intense scenes or the edge of your seat suspense isn't what makes it frightening, nor is it the melodramatic opera-like music.

It is the concept that is frightening: Five ordinary people (ordinary only if the movie-goer can accept the fact that 'ordinary' sane people will do such things to each other) with some medical training decide that they can find the answers by killing themselves. Unfortunately, it gets harder and

harder to bring them back, probably because each of them has foolishly decided to remain dead longer.

In one incredibly unbelievable scene, Julia Roberts challenged Keifer Sutherland by saying she'll go for "five minutes" rather than his "four-forty."

Although the movie revolves around Keifer Sutherland (probably because the sin he has to atone for is the most serious), especially strong performances are given by Kevin Bacon (who plays an atheist who is convinced everyone is hallucinating until he decides to be the next subject) and Julia Roberts.

William Baldwin, who plays a womanizer with a fiance, is thrown in for a bit of comic relief while Oliver Pratt (whose character can't stop dictating everything he sees into a dictaphone in a voice dramatically reminiscent of "Geraldo") is there to put everything into some kind of down-to-Earth common sense.

"I did not come to medical school so I could kill my colleagues," he says in that derogative, hushed tone. But he does anyway, because he too gets caught up in the fascination Sutherland instills in them all, because he too wants the answers to death.

Surprisingly enough, none return from the dead with permanent brain damage or illness. All are healthy as before, ready to begin their careers as doctors.

One can only hope, with their extra-curricular midnight experiments, that they don't end up

as our family physicians. One gets the feeling at the beginning that they are all slightly mad.

This is only overcome by each student's intensely inquisitive curiosity to solve the unknown. The fact that one of the bunch wouldn't turn Sutherland in for concocting such a plan in the first place is perhaps one of the writer's few faults.

Flatliners gives no answers, it gives no solutions to the universal question of life and death. Writer Filardi has come up with an excellent script and a good pilot for movie-goers to escape for an hour or two, but that is all.

Hollywood doesn't have the answers, but it does have one very good film on its hands.

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