

PHONE BOOTH

US, 2003, d. Joel Schumacher



Stu Shepard (Colin Farrell) is a cocky young publicist. His clothes, his mobile phone, his deals for clients—all these define who he is. He tries to impress his trainee, Adam, and is infatuated with an aspiring actress, Pam (Katie Holmes). He loves his wife, Kelly (Radha Mitchell), but this does not stop him from going into the only old-fashioned phone booth left in Manhattan every day, slipping off his wedding ring, and calling Pam.



As he removes his ring to call Pam one day, a man tries to deliver a pizza to him in the booth. Stu rudely sends him away. When the phone rings in the booth, Stu answers it. It is a man (Kiefer Sutherland) who tells Stu it is not in his best interest to hang up. Stu is then caught in a terrorizing conversation with the caller, who boasts that he has executed several men who were morally guilty of cruelty, greed, or deception and would not confess to their sins and failings. The caller proves he is serious when he shoots Leon, a pimp who is trying to force Stu to leave the phone booth so his prostitutes can use the phone. The police converge, a crowd gathers, and the television crews turn up. Everyone thinks Stu is Leon's killer at first, and the caller/sniper threatens Stu with death if he hangs up or lets the police know what is actually happening.

The sniper enjoys tormenting Stu in a cat and mouse game. He forces him to do dangerous things like reaching for a gun hidden near the light in the ceiling of the phone booth. When Kelly arrives on the scene, the caller insists that Stu tell the truth about his infidelities to her in front of everyone, which Stu does.

Captain Ramey (Forest Whitaker), who heads the police effort, slowly figures out what is happening. He, too, is humiliated when the sniper/caller insists that Stu confront him with secret truths about his life. But the captain remains steady, willing to hear the truth. Eventually, the sniper's threats and lies overwhelm Stu, who makes a full confession of his deceit-filled life to everyone watching. He leaves the booth, arms extended, willing to be killed. The police shoot him with a rubber bullet to misdirect the sniper. The media records every word and action for the evening news.

Stu and the captain figure out the sniper's location. When the police arrive, they find only the dead pizza man. The police assume it is the killer who shot himself. The medic gives Stu an injection for the pain as he waits in the ambulance. As Stu begins to feel the drug's effect, the real sniper passes by and urges Stu to maintain his new-found honesty.

During the 1930s, Patrick Hamilton (author of *Gaslight*) wrote a radio play about a man who was pursued from telephone booth to telephone booth by an unseen assailant until he was shamed into admitting the truth about his life. Seventy years later, the concept reached the screen with this film written by Larry Cohen and directed by Joel Schumacher. Cohen became successful in the 1970s and 1980s by writing and directing a succession of small-budget horror films such as *It's Alive*, *The Stuff*, and *Q, The Winged Serpent*. Joel Schumacher directed some of the biggest hits of the 1990s, including *Falling Down*, two *Batman* films, and two adaptations of John Grisham novels, *A Time to Kill* and *The Client*. He also directed the movie version of Andrew Lloyd Webber's *The Phantom of the Opera*. However, he made a number of small-budget dramas like *Flawless* and his Vietnam movie, *Tigerland*. *Phone Booth* was made in ten days with a minimal budget and has a very brief running time, but Schumacher's flair ensures that this is an impressive and tense drama.

Colin Farrell emerged as a popular leading man in Schumacher's *Tigerland* and reinforced it in *Hart's War*, *Minority Report*, *Daredevil*, *The Recruit*, and *S.W.A.T.* He appeared in seven films in 2003 and had the lead role in the 2004 epic *Alexander*, directed and written by Oliver Stone. Farrell suits the part of Stu perfectly. Kiefer Sutherland provides the sinister voice of the judgmental sniper, and Forest Whitaker (*The Crying Game*) is the careful and sympathetic police chief. Schumacher is something of a razzle-dazzle director, and he uses this style to pump up audience tension and excitement by pacing Stu's growing exasperation, the hectic pulse of Manhattan, and the circus atmosphere provided by the crowds of onlookers and the media.

Katie Holmes (*Dawson's Creek*; *I know what You did Last Summer*, *The Gift*, *The Singing Detective*) appears as Stu's unwitting girlfriend, and Radha Mitchell (*High Art*, *Pitch Black*, *Melinda and Melinda*) as his wife.