

## REEL CRITIQUE

### MOVIE REVIEWS

#### Message in a Bottle

Starring Kevin Costner and Robin Wright Penn

Directed by Luis Mandoki

Playing at Hollywood 16

darker, murkier subtexts that pervade and Max remains an enigmatic and ambiguous creature.

Max patronizes most of the adults in the film and, spanning generations, becomes the best friend to the blandly hilarious Mr. Blume. There is a sense that this is Max's world and we are all just living in it (Grade: B+).

— Jeff Schmidt

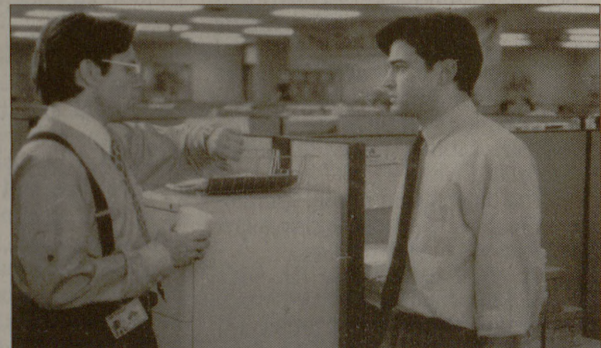


PHOTO COURTESY OF TWENTIETH CENTURY FOX  
Peter (Livingston) gets another lecture from his boss, in the Mike Judge's first live action film *Office Space*.

#### Office Space

Starring Ron Livingston and Jennifer Aniston

Directed by Mike Judge

Playing at Hollywood 16

The turning point in Peter's (Livingston) life is when he visits a hypnotist at the beginning of the film *Office Space*. Peter, the film's protagonist, tells the therapist that because of his job, "Every single day has been worse than the day before, so that everyday you see me is the worst day of my life."

Peter is then lured into hypnosis and when he awakens, he skips out on work, cleans fish at his desk and tells efficiency experts he only works 15 minutes a day. The candidness with which Peter approaches his work now prompts the efficiency experts to label him as a "straight shooter with upper management skills." After Peter's friends, Samir (Ajay Naidu) and the unfortunately named Michael Bolton (David Herman) are laid off, the three conspire to rip off the company they work for with a plot they lifted from *Superman III*.

*Office Space* was inspired by the "Milton" cartoons that appeared on "Saturday Night Live." "Milton" was written by Mike Judge, the creative force behind "Beavis and Butt-head" and "King of the Hill," and *Office Space* is his first foray into live-action filmmaking.

The results are often hilarious and molded after the violence in Scorsese and Tarantino films. Judge has a way of giving the most mundane characters a biting wit and he has the gall to ridicule everything from corporate America to waiters at a T.G.I. Friday's knockoff (Grade: B).

— Jeff Schmidt

#### Blast from the Past

Starring Brendan Fraser and Alicia Silverstone

Directed by Hugh Wilson

Playing at Hollywood 16

The Webbers family emerges from a fallout shelter in *Blast from the Past*, bringing a whole new meaning to the term nuclear family.

Calvin (Christopher Walken) and his pregnant wife, Helen (Sissy Spacek), mistake a crashed jet for a nuclear attack, and move into a fallout shelter constructed by Calvin. In the shelter for the next 35 years, Helen gives birth to Adam (Fraser, his name a play on the Biblical Adam and the Atom Bomb) and raises him to appreciate the finer things in life: Rob Roys and Perry Como.

When Calvin has a heart attack, the now-grown Adam is sent out into the modern world of drive-bys and drag queen prostitutes to gather more supplies. He also wants to meet a girl, and does, in the form of the bitter Eve (Silverstone). A girl from Pasadena, Calif. who does not glow.

The film is at its best and funniest when it focuses on the contrasting eras — the 1960s and the 1990s. When Adam first hits the streets he sees a black postal carrier and exclaims, "Oh my lucky stars a negro!"

Fraser is his usual wide-eyed comedic self, but Silverstone's limitations are becoming apparent. *Blast from the Past* is like *Pleasantville* in reverse, but it does not quite have the appeal or the astuteness of that film. *Blast from the Past* skirts the fine line between good and dull, never finding itself or providing consistent laughs (Grade: B-).

— Jeff Schmidt

St. Valentine's Day has come and gone, and the traditional release of a great date-movie is inevitable. *Message in a Bottle* was supposed to be the perfect movie to make for a perfect date.

Based on the best-selling novel by Nicholas Sparks, *Message in a Bottle* is a movie about love, both lost and found.

After a bad divorce, Teresa Osborne (Wright Penn), consumed with caring for her son and her career at the *Chicago Tribune*. While on a brief vacation Teresa goes on her daily jog when she comes across a bottle stuck in the sand on a deserted beach. Surprised to find a note in the bottle, she reads the message thoroughly and becomes infatuated with the writer's prose. Teresa then begins to track down the mystery man "G." This premise is rather pathetic. Searching for a man on the basis of a letter is hard to swallow, and proves to be the first hurdle the film needs to overcome.

By this point in the movie, there is really no suspense. The audience knows that the man she is searching for is Costner. The only mystery left is how they will develop a relationship.

The evidence she finds brings her to a shipbuilding town in North Carolina. She manipulates her way into Garret Blake's (Costner) life without revealing her true motivation.

Costner successfully portrays Garret as a man without hope. Garret lost his wife two years prior to meeting Teresa and has not had a relationship with a woman since then. To ease his pain, Garret puts all of his time and energy into sailboat restoration and building.

On the other hand, Theresa easily wins the heart of Garret's father, Dodge (Paul Newman). Dodge is a wise man who is content with living near his son. Newman does an excellent job of adding humor to a rather dreary love story and, as a Hollywood legend, creates an unforgettable character in a rather forgettable movie.

Teresa originally travels to find out about the true man behind the letters, but eventually begins to fall in love. Garret begins to develop feelings for her and does not quite know how to handle them. Theresa's failure to tell him the truth about her circumstances refreshes tension between the two. One day he is going to find out about her obsession to track him down and will surely be upset. No one is quite sure when it is going to happen, but as the movie gets longer and longer, the audience sees it coming.

The acting in this movie is quite convincing. Costner and Wright Penn accurately demonstrate the body language and dialogue of new-found love in this film. (Grade: C-).

— By Jeff Kempf



PHOTO COURTESY OF TOUCHSTONE PICTURES

In the comedic movie *Rushmore*, Max (Schwartzman) and Miss Cross (Williams) watch Blume (Murray) dance.

#### Rushmore

Starring Jason Schwartzman and Bill Murray

Directed by Wes Anderson

Playing at Hollywood 16

There has never been a more self-confident and cocksure nerd than beekeeper, director and calligrapher Max (Schwartzman).

However, Max's extracurricular activities interfere with his academic performance and he is put on "sudden death probation" at his posh private school, Rushmore Academy.

Instead of concentrating on his classes, Max becomes infatuated with a teacher, Miss Cross (Olivia Williams), and decides to build a giant aquarium on the school's baseball field in her honor. Steel tycoon, Mr. Blume (Murray), also falls for Miss Cross, inciting a bitter war between he and Max.

*Rushmore* cops out on greatness by avoiding the

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