



Boo: Kevin Bacon plays an ordinary guy who has this problem with the dead.

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Stir of Echoes a haunting success

BY SHAWN KEHOE

Forget giant asteroids and hostile aliens, 1999 was the year of the ghost film.

This past summer saw no fewer than four such theatrical releases, in the form of *The Blair Witch Project*, *The Haunting*, *The Sixth Sense* and Artisan Entertainment's *Stir of Echoes*, which is based on Richard Matheson's 1958 novel by the same name.

In the film, Tom Witzky (Kevin Bacon) is living a poor man's version of the American Dream. He lives in a rented house with his wife, Maggie (Kathryn Erbe), who is pregnant with their second child - much to Tom's chagrin. Tom is tired of his mundane existence, of being "so ordinary." This all changes after he's hypnotized at a local street

party, as his life becomes anything but mundane.

Tom begins experiencing precognitive flashes and visitations from...what? A hallucination? A ghost? He's not quite sure; but these strange events quickly take a toll on his sanity and marriage. As the visions increase in intensity, Tom is forced to unearth the mysteries of his newly renovated home.

Bacon gives a fitting performance as a man on the edge, to whom the supernatural has given a hard shove from behind. As Tom becomes increasingly hostile to those around him, the writers risk alienating the character to the audience. Then again, obsessed men usually don't possess refined social graces. Erbe's role of Maggie has the distinction of being the only sane character in the film. Erbe care-

fully avoided overplaying the part, which could have detracted from the realism and atmosphere of the film.

Visually, *Stir of Echoes* is a stunning film, combining evocative imagery and the use of the Rolling Stones song, "Paint it Black" (redone by Gob), to a terrifying effect.

If you have yet to see *The Sixth Sense* (shame on you!), you may be torn between watching it or *Stir of Echoes*. Both films are effective depictions of modern hauntings, and how the victims cope in a world which holds more with the likes of Freud and Jung than Charles Dickens or Helen Creighton. If possible, see them both. If not, then know that *Stir of Echoes* has the ending that *The Sixth Sense* should have had, which, given the subject material, is not necessarily a happy one.

Mumford — makes your problems seem normal

BY LEE PITTS

A quirky comedy about a psychologist and his patients in small town America. That about sums up *Mumford*.

Well actually, there is a little more to it. It's about a psychologist who uses unorthodox practices to help his patients, including kicking them out of his office when he's tired of listening to them.

It might sound like a boring way to spend an hour and a half, but the movie does have some surprises. The ending is predictable, with a guy sees girl, guy wants girl, guy gets girl plot, but the road there is comical.

The movie focuses on the life Dr. Mumford, who lives and works in the small U.S. town of

Mumford, and the names are no coincidence.

At first, Mumford seems like a normal psychologist, but his methods are abnormal and unethical, potentially violating every aspect of a therapist's duty. He sets patients up on dates, goes to their homes for meals and buys them pornography.

The most forbidden thing of all happens when Mumford falls in love with one of his patients. Even though Mumford isn't supposed to date his patients, he arranges each session to take on the form of a date, like taking long walks and sharing a paper route.

Nothing is sacred around Dr. Mumford. If a patient has a secret, others soon find out. When it comes to privacy, Dr. Mumford doesn't know the meaning of the word. He blabs everything,

including his own big secret — he's not even a psychologist.

This is where the movie takes a twist, as he tries to explain to one of his patients that he didn't actually study psychology in college but rather, is a runaway cocaine addict.

There are jokes in this movie, but the true humor arises from the quirky nature of the characters.

It is too bad the ending is so predictable. Everything is resolved, for Mumford hooks-up with the love of his life, while his other patients all find dates, and go home happy.

The movie is definitely a no-brainer, and despite a few twists and turns, there is nothing to figure out. Just sit, watch, laugh and everything will be explained in the end.

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