

Nicholson, Pfeiffer howl in graphic tale of lycanthropy

Big-name stars deliver in new take on classic story



"Wolf"



Joel Strauch
Staff Reporter

Easily the best werewolf movie ever made, "Wolf" guarantees a howling good time.

This supernatural tale begins with mild-mannered Will Randall (Jack Nicholson) running down a wolf with his car. Believing the animal to be dead, he starts to drag it to the side of the road when it bites him.

Randall gets a rabies shot and returns to normal life. He finds that he has been demoted at work and is too old and insecure to fight with his boss about it.

Over the next few days, he finds himself growing stronger both physically and mentally. He uses his heightened senses and resolve to reclaim his job, discover that his wife is cheating on him and begin a new relationship with Laura Alden (Michelle Pfeiffer), the young and vivacious daughter of his boss.

But Randall also discovers that his revivification may be too good to be true. He speaks to a shaman who tells him that his blessing is also a curse that will turn him into a wolf at the next full moon.

People die, Randall struggles to hold on to Alden and his humanity, and the movie ends in a slightly predictable but still quite fitting



Courtesy of Columbia Pictures

Jack Nicholson (Will Randall) and Michelle Pfeiffer (Laura Alden) star in "Wolf," in which Nicholson becomes a werewolf.

manner.

The film is chock-full of graphic scenes, giving it the dark reality that a supernatural thriller deserves. Unlike other namby-pamby horror releases of late (namely "Dracula"), "Wolf" captures the essence of the fear that legends about creatures of

the night used to instill in the common folk.

The acting is superb. James Spader gives a great performance as Stewart Swinton, Randall's rival for his job and Alden's affections. Pfeiffer again shows her acting strength in her role as a woman who

is attracted by Randall's animal magnetism, but not quite ready to believe his tales of lycanthropy.

Of course, Nicholson is perfect. A two-time Oscar winner, Jack plays the part of the man-wolf as if he had actually undergone the metamorphosis. Even more convincing

is his ability to show the weaker, defeated side of Randall before he gains his wolfish abilities.

The ending is not fantastic, but it is strong enough to hold together a truly phenomenal horrific thriller. If you're ready for a change, see "Wolf."

'Ruby' shows audiences trials, triumphs of growing up



"It was a neat story," the main character in "Ruby in Paradise" says of a Jane Austen novel, in response to her boyfriend's overanalytical critique. The same can be said of the movie.

"Ruby in Paradise" is a thoughtful, moody portrait of a young woman with a mature attitude. Ruby Lee Gissing leaves home after high school, moves to northwest Florida where she

gets a job in a gift shop, becomes involved with a couple of men in succession and advances her career after a setback.

The strength of the movie is not in its relatively uneventful plot, but in the accurate glimpses it gives us into the moments of this woman's life.

It is a growing-up story, showing the struggle we all face at potentially any stage of our lives to maintain our independence even when we are offered desperately needed help, and to fulfill our personal dreams while trying to fit into a larger system.

Written and directed by a man, Victor Nunez, the film accurately portrays a young woman's perspective, aided by Ashley Judd's excellent

performance. Besides being talented and intelligent, the younger sister of Wynonna incidentally shows how beautiful a Judd woman can be without henna and sequins.

The movie also speaks about some general issues of human nature. The director gives us some lingering shots of the gaudy knick-knacks Ruby sells at the tourist trap where she works. Then we see her lovingly place a seashell figurine on a table at her home, while she talks to a friend about the rocking chair she has kept as a memento of her grandfather. People use objects — no matter how ugly or pretty — to help them remember people and places in their lives.

In the scene where Ruby dances at a club with Ricky, the boss's horndog

son, the director innovatively flashforwards to the two of them in bed, and back to them dancing. This adds some originality and character to the lame cliché of sex scenes in the movies.

By showing this relationship, the movie addresses the issue of romance at work, which in this case eventually turns into sexual harassment. Ruby is unfairly fired, and eventually finds herself doing grunt work in a laundry.

In contrast, the early scenes between Ruby and Mike McCaslin, the "intellectual, sensitive guy" she meets at a greenhouse, capture some of the awkwardness, honesty and pleasure of dating between two people who have just met.

There is a mythical element to the

movie. At the dark point in Ruby's life, which occurs during winter, she is aided at the laundry by two older, protective women. One of them is named Persefina, like the Greek goddess of spring, Persephone, who lived underground during the winter only to emerge triumphant each spring.

The director then cuts to celebratory scenes of spring break, as Ruby's life takes a turn for the better.

"Ruby in Paradise" is a funny, thoughtful movie that speaks to experiences we all share, in particular to the experience of young people growing up. It is showing at the Mary Riepma Ross Film Theater today through Sunday.

— Jim Cihlar