

# Mumford: A Real Couch Trip

By Nicole Burkholder  
Capital Times Staff Writer

Comebacks in Hollywood remind me of the dreaded Classic Rock Reunion tour. Both usually result in an aged star trying to grasp at the current trends while desperately clinging to the lost decade that once made them famous.

John Hughes, director of 80s teen faves *Pretty in Pink* and *Sixteen Candles*, used to be the king of high school. His comeback left him scrambling for laughs with not-so-funny projects like *Home Alone* and *Beethoven*. You get the point.

When I heard that Lawrence Kasdan had written and directed his first movie since *Wyatt Earp* in 1994, I initially expected the "comeback" syndrome. An out of touch writer/director of comedy that has laughs that max out at "Ha."

Being the optimist that I am, I did consider that both Billy Bragg and Wilco performed on the soundtrack. Nevertheless, Jason Lee rarely disappoints. At least the music would be good.

I was pleasantly surprised.

Kasdan's story centers on Dr. Mumford who has just recently moved his practice to a new town that is also named Mumford. His practice is booming and everybody loves Dr. Mumford.

The movie starts out with a collage of the quirky patients of Doc Mumford (Loren Dean). From short bald sex fanatics to anorexic, self-conscious teens, I couldn't help but laugh hysterically at their pathetic lives. I love people more neurotic than myself.

Kasdan also throws in some "Theatre of the Absurd" tactics which won me over all together. All I have to say is that I feel sorry for the creators of "Unsolved Mysteries."

Kasdan shows no mercy in pointing out the ridiculous nature of the show's meager attempts to be a serious, worthwhile piece of television. Re-enactments of the show's re-enactments are absolutely hysterical!

Of course, if you are a true fan of "Unsolved Mysteries," you won't appreciate the commentary which would also indicate that you should get out more often.

Jason Lee gives his usual comedic performance as Skip Skipperton, but this time he threw in a curveball. Jill

Karwoski, a fellow Cap Times staff writer, accompanied Dan and I on this particular trip to the movies. Much to her delight, Lee did not only act, he skateboarded. I personally know nothing about skateboarding, but apparently it was pretty good. Jill couldn't stop squirming in her seat and I came close to having to remove her from the theater for fear she might shriek with delight.

Apparently, Lee had previously sworn off skating in any movies for fear he might be type-casted as a "skater" and not used as an actor. He must have really liked Kasdan's screenplay because he goes so far as to perform a mini skate routine on an elaborate ramp set-up.

In the context of the movie, I found his skating to be a comical accent on his character. For all of you skateboard fans out there like Jill, it is pure ecstasy.

Another bonus in the movie is the revival of Martin Short. I cannot remember the last good movie that I saw Short act in until now. He does not disappoint as a wacky lawyer who tries to ruin Mumford.

His efforts are hysterical in combination with his cohorts, Dr. Ernest Delbanco (David Paymer) and Dr. Phyllis Sheeler (Jane Adams).

The latter two play the town psychologist and psychiatrist who are rapidly losing business to Dr. Mumford, and exhibit their own neuroses better than curing those of their patients.

At some points, these three characters seem to slap all three professions of law, psychology, and psychiatry in the face with no remorse. It seems like Kasdan has some issues of his own with these types of people.

As the story unfolds, Dr. Mumford is challenged by the beautiful Sofie Crisp (Hope Davis), a new patient suffering from Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. Mumford is immediately stricken with the "love bug".

This is where I started to get weary about the movie. Even though I am a female, I really hate most romantic comedies that make you spontaneously break into tears. I was especially worried that Dan would leave because he hates this kind of thing more than I do.

Luckily, Kasdan slips the

story into the rest of the oddball comedy. I actually liked it, and Dan didn't even try to leave.

Girls, if you are looking for something you can take your man to, this is the one. I won't promise that he'll be smitten with the movie, but he most likely will not hang it over your head for the next year.

I definitely recommend this movie to anyone with a sense of humor. I thoroughly enjoyed myself and I'm quite happy that my "comeback" theory was disproved.

If you're wondering if it was a little unprofessional that Dr. Mumford dates his patients, or if the fact that the town name is also Mumford seems a little ironic, there is only one answer...watch the movie!



By Daniel McClure  
Capital Times Staff Writer

In my defense, I started this movie reviewing job at a bad time for movies. Late summer is notorious for being a dumping ground for the studio's worst offerings; for every *Sixth Sense* there are at least four *Astronaut's Wife's*.

I have been criticized for not liking movies at all. This is not true, I love movies and that is why I write these reviews. So it brings me pleasure to say that *Mumford* is a very good movie, not a great one, but good none the less.

What took me by surprise is how well the humor is handled in the movie. It is not only intelligent, but it is also periodically absurd and hilarious.

I did not expect Larry Kasdan, the writer and director of *Mumford* and also *The Big Chill* and *The Bodyguard*, to create a comedy that is reminiscent of Joel and Ethan Coen's (*The Big*

*Lebowski, Fargo*) pictures.

Where the Coen brothers continuously load their movies with absurdity (and hilarity), *Mumford* has short bursts of off-the-wall humor that creates an interesting feel and gives originality to the movie.

There are bits in *Mumford* that are worth the price of admission alone. The television show "Unsolved Mysteries" gets a deserved but also reverent parody.

The flashback sequences where Dr. Mumford describes where he came from are extremely funny because they are incredibly ridiculous and directed with an over-the-top style reminiscent of the Coen Brothers.

While it could have been easy to simply exploit the problems of Dr. Mumford's patients, the handling never feels that way. There is always a sense of good will towards their neurosis, even towards the patient that cannot stop fantasizing about being in a 1950s noir "Romance" novel.

Between these short bursts, the movie generally succeeds also. Of course there has to be a requisite love story thrown in. The love story, at times is a little too sappy for my cynical tastes, but that is more a matter of my personal preference and I applaud Kasdan for actually developing a romance instead of putting two people together on screen and playing a generic love song over the background as the couple looks at each other.

The only thing that did not settle well with me was the treatment of the actual psychiatrists, psychologists, and medical doctors.

This was not a direct attack on the medical establishment, but there were times were it was implied that the professionals were the enemy because they failed to listen to their patients. *Mumford* also implies that almost any mental patient needs is someone to listen to.

Yes, like any profession there are some that do not care, but to suggest that all anyone needs is someone to listen to is incredibly simplistic.

This by no means takes away from the movie. Kasdan employs such a light hand in direction so that everything is treated genially and never becomes a rallying cry against the medical establishment.

The movie *Mumford*, besides

being a good comedy, also signifies something more. Besides the Coen Brothers, the web site "The Onion," and "The Conan O'Brien Show," there is not much intelligent humor in mainstream entertainment.

Of course there is a lot out there that is hilarious, but unfortunately it never gets the success it deserves. *Mumford* was a surprise because I honestly was not expecting very much in the way of comedy.

I should point out that I have nothing against toilet humor. It is frequently funny as it was in *Dumb and Dumber* and the other movies, it is just that it is all that seems to be available in a typical movie theater.

Unfortunately I was one of about seven theater patrons that night, which also happened to be opening night. I did my part in helping to fund these movies and showing my support. I encourage you all to do the same.

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