

NOW SHOWING

★ ★ ★ Flatliners

Oaks 6 East

His name was Jeff, but we called him Pudge. Pudge was stocky, fairly intelligent, wore glasses and cried easily. I never really teased him myself, but I never really stopped the kids who did, either. That was in grade school and I haven't thought of Pudge in more than a decade. But that's exactly the kind of memory conjured up by *Flatliners*, a nifty thriller directed by Joel Schumacher.

A group of medical students decides to find out if there is "activity beyond death." Using equipment commandeered from the lab, they lower the

body temperature of Nelson (Kiefer Sutherland), inject him with a solution to stop his heart, wait until the machines monitoring his vital signs show only flat lines and then revive him as best they can.

Astonishingly, it works. Nelson is shaken by the experience, but he insists that there was definitely something out there. Thrilled by their discovery, the other students are soon competing to go next. They vie for



COLUMBIA PICTURES

Five medical students tamper with life after death and get more than they bargain for in Flatliners.

priority by pledging to remain clinically dead for longer and longer periods of time.

One by one they die. And one

by one they come back with "after-life" memories. Unfortunately, something else comes back as well.

Each student is plagued by guilt over a traumatic incident. Rachel (Julia Roberts) is reminded of her father's suicide. Joe (William Baldwin) remembers all the women he has secretly videotaped while having sex. And everyone begins

to have bizarre hallucinations in which someone from the past confronts them.

Flatliners is a classic horror

film. It's a sternly moralistic tale in which the heroes learn that you shouldn't tamper with nature. Schumacher directs the ensemble cast with snappy precision, balancing the tension of the staged resurrections with humor.

Schumacher does a good job of representing the after-life experiences, using everything from dream-like montages to eerie reenactments of childhood memories. Unfortunately, the scenes in which the students try to reconcile with their pasts are not nearly as cathartic as intended.

But it's slick, engrossing entertainment. The question of life after death is inherently interesting. While *Flatliners* may deal with that question in a superficial, parlour-game fashion, it does so with verve.

BY MICHAEL GILTZ