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PREMONITION

Note: Plot details will be revealed, so here's the Spoiler Alert for those of you who haven't seen the film, and for the two or three of you who haven't seen the film's previews*, which give away the entire movie.)*

Hollywood entertainments, in general, aim so low that it's disheartening to chastise one for aiming relatively high. But the psychological thriller-cum-melodrama *Premonition* is infuriating precisely *because* of its lofty ambitions. For a goodly stretch of the film - nearly the entire first hour - the plotting is clever enough and the direction (by Mennan Yapo) suggestive enough to keep you focused and alert; you're eager to solve the movie's many mysteries along with its heroine. But I left the auditorium frustrated and a little bit angry, and still haven't figured out exactly whom to blame this on.

For the moment, I'm going with screenwriter Bill Kelly, even though *Premonition*'s setup is, theoretically at least, a pretty terrific one. Homemaker Linda Hanson (Sandra Bullock) wakes up one Thursday, and is soon visited by a police officer, who informs her that her husband, Jim (Julian McMahon) - who left on a business trip the previous morning - died in a highway crash. Yet the next morning, Linda wakes to find Jim alive and well. It turns out that what should be Friday is actually Monday, and Linda assumes Thursday's ordeal to have merely been a very bad dream. The *next* morning, though, she awakens to find her living room full of mourners; it's Saturday, and Jim is indeed dead. What's going on here?

Linda gradually realizes that she's entered some kind of chronological nightmare, and by witnessing events happen *before* they actually happen, she may be able to prevent her husband's death. It's a fun, spooky premise, and even though the characters are instantly recognizable types and the dialogue is an underwhelming mixture of the expository and the obvious, you're eager to give it the benefit of the doubt.

For a while. It eventually becomes clear, though, that not only is Kelly not expecting you to use your intellect in uncovering the film's mysteries; he'd much prefer you *didn't*. Nagging inconsistencies pop up one after the other: Why, when Linda drops a container of lithium in her sink on Tuesday, does she not discover it there until the day of her husband's funeral? Did no one *use* that sink over the course of four days? (It's made pretty clear that her husband *must* have.) Why, after her daughter has a disfiguring accident on Tuesday, does the little girl have scars on her face on Saturday but not Thursday? And on that subject, why is Linda carted away to the loony bin for not knowing how her daughter was injured? Didn't anyone think to ask the *child,* who certainly would have cleared up the matter? Kelly wants you to pay attention to his plotting but not too *much* attention. (The screenwriter, perhaps rightly, assumes a very short attention span on the part of his audience.)

But the plot holes are nothing compared to the maddening way that Kelly explains Linda's precognitive abilities, which he does by - as you may have anticipated - *not* explaining them. At one point, Linda consults a priest, who reads her a litany of oracular miracles from the past, summing up with a pithy "History is full of unexplained phenomena." It was at this moment that I all but threw my hands in the air, realizing that the screenwriter wasn't even going to *bother* with psychological or spiritual rationales - Linda is living life out of sync because she *is*, damn it.

You can forgive laziness of this sort in a movie where the "How?" doesn't matter much - as in the similarly dopey, far more enjoyable Bullock vehicle *The Lake House* - but not in a film that keeps insisting that its discordant puzzle pieces are perfectly tied together; you wait for the big "A-*ha*!" moment, when you'll learn *why* Linda is living her days in this particular order, and it never arrives. I wound up feeling like an idiot for *trying* to make sense of the movie.

Stuck in hackneyed roles, McMahon, Kate Nelligan (as Linda's mother), and Nia Long (as Linda's *de rigueur* confidante) haven't been asked to do much more than show up, but that's still more than Bullock seems to have done. Sadly, it's becoming more and more clear that Bullock's approach to dramatic roles lies in a simple directive: Don't smile so much. When, as Linda, Bullock is first told of her husband's death, she plays the moment with grim stoicism, which makes sense - Linda is in shock. Over the subsequent 90 minutes, couldn't the actress have played something *else*?

As Kelly routinely glides over elements such as logic and emotional state - he gives Linda snide, under-her-breath retorts exactly when the character *wouldn't* be delivering them - huge chunks of the movie can't work unless we see Linda's desperation and possible madness, unless we see the *toll* that this twisted scenario is taking on her. Yet Bullock provides no sense of Linda's interior life; she basically performs varying degrees of glum. Considering the already ludicrous nature of the material, perhaps Bullock feared overacting in *Premonition*. But the role of Linda is pointless without understanding her mental state from scene to scene - certainly the film's climax is dependent on it - and here, Bullock underacts to the point of vanishing.

Which, all things considered, isn't the worst idea in the world. Though Yapo piques our interest with his unsubtle but effective placement of recurring motifs - a dead bird, a wine bottle - and often sustains a mood of eerie disquiet, the film gets sillier and sillier as it progresses, and the climax is a real botch; prior to the film's final sequence, it feels as if about six essential scenes have gone missing. *Premonition* has the distinction of rarely being dull, but in the end, that's only because you're doing more work than the *filmmakers* appear to be; few Hollywood movies are as annoying as those that tease you with their smarts before proving to be abjectly stupid.

DEEP SEA 3-D

Last summer, in reviewing the Putnam Museum & IMAX Theatre's presentation of *The Living Sea* , I wrote that the venue's enormous screen should "be put to better use than serving as the area's biggest fish tank." I take it back. The documentary *Deep Sea 3-D* may be the best time I've ever had at an IMAX edu-tainment. Unlike *Hurricane on the Bayou* (or, for that matter, *The Living Sea*), Howard Hall's 40-minute nature doc doesn't feel overly crammed with information, and the 3D visuals are absolutely delightful; with its ravishing colors, graceful rhythms, and endlessly fascinating sea life, I'm not sure I stopped grinning at the movie even *once* . (My favorite creature was the Wolf Eel, which a friend said looked like a Muppet, and it did strongly resemble the love child of Statler and Waldorf.) *Deep Sea 3-D* is tremendously enjoyable, and I officially apologize for that crack I made in last year's review. I guess I was feeling out of sorts. Maybe it was just bad fish.