

# Bullock falls a week short with rehab drama '28 Days'

By Samuel McKewon

Senior editor

Sandra Bullock, at the very least, deserves credit for trying. Never much of a dramatic actress, she strays about as far from the shore as she can go in "28 Days" as a boozy party girl tossed into rehabilitation.

But even as a drunk, Bullock is talented enough to bury her label of likability, and maybe she wants it that

way. But it certainly hurt this movie.

The "Sandy" persona, both real and written into Susannah Grant's script, keeps the character, Gwen, from exploring the dark corners of an addict's world. We've been here before, and never has detox looked this sunny. Call it Rehab Lite.

Actually, it's called Serenity Glen, Gwen's destination (Bullock) after a hard night on the sauce and a few hard falls at her sister's

(Elizabeth Perkins) wedding the next day, during which she smashes a limousine into a house. Faced with jail or getting clean, Gwen chooses rehab, figuring she can coast through and still keep her Vicodin addiction on the side.

Not unpredictably, Grant (who wrote the far superior "Erin Brockovich") and director Betty Thomas litter the Serenity scene with a usual cast of eccentrics — a young

heroin addict (Azura Skye), a snobby Gerhardt (Alan Tudyk) and crack mother (Marianne Jean-Baptiste), among others — to fill out the scenery.

Steve Buscemi plays it very straight as a counseling ex-addict who's seen Gwen's wisecracking type enough times to know she'll eventually break down and accept treatment or die. She has few choices left.

But "28 Days" would rather we not dwell on that reality, opting for goofiness and Bullock's throwaway charm for comedy. There are a few nice touches, including the "M\*A\*S\*H"-style announcements constantly running through the hospital. Baptiste, an Academy Award-nominated actress hidden away in a small role, has a nice moment late in the movie.

So many more don't work. Gerhardt's strange accent is milked for all its worth, and the Serenity Glen affirmation chant gets very old, very fast.

The flat jokes trump some of Bullock's finer acting moments, though it pales to any single moment from Winona Ryder or Angelina Jolie in "Girl, Interrupted." Bullock can only go so far as an actress, never crossing the bridge into the fear and pain of addiction withdrawal.

Then again, Gwen is afforded no truly destructive qualities. We see in flashbacks that it might have been all her mother's fault. Later, sister admits her faults in a teary-eyed lakeside chat. Gwen's boyfriend (Dominic West, in a super-thankless role) is convinced life is misery deadened by chemical substances

## REVIEW 28 Days

**STARS:** Sandra Bullock, Steve Buscemi, Viggo Mortensen  
**DIRECTOR:** Betty Thomas  
**RATING:** PG-13 (booze and some adult language)  
**GRADE:** C  
**FIVE WORDS:** Another middle-roader for Bullock.

and seems bent on marrying her. Eventually, this subplot gets to its resolution, as does a budding romance between Gwen and a baseball player (Viggo Mortensen).

Only once does the movie choose to remind us the hardships of rehab, and it plays out in the predictably tragic form, borrowing an ending from "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" without doing the work to deserve it.

Strangely, at the end of Bullock's 28 days, most of the patients who were there when she arrived are...still there. Did they opt for the 35-day treatment? It reveals Thomas' juvenile, egocentric treatment of the subject.

For Bullock, "28 Days" is another ho-hum effort to add to a resume mostly vacant of quality movies. It's been four years since "A Time to Kill," and since then, a marginal character in that movie, Ashley Judd, has crafted a more lucrative career.

That says less about Judd's ability than Bullock's lack thereof, whether in acting or judgment. A sunny screen disposition got her this far. But this bus line, as "28 Days" proved, goes no further.

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