

DVD Select: Flashback, flash-forward in 'Premonition'

by Robert_J_Hawkins

Linda Hanson is having a really - I mean really - bad week. In the psychological drama "Premonition" (Sony, 2 stars), Linda (Sandra Bullock) wakes up on Thursday to find that her husband, Jim (Julian McMahon) is dead.

'PREMONITION' - Shyanne McClure, Courtney Taylor Burness and Sandra Bullock are featured in the psychological thriller 'Premonition.' CNS Photo courtesy of Ron Batzdorf. DVD RATINGS

4 stars: Don't miss: rent it/buy it

3 stars: Worth the risk: rent it

2 stars: On the tipping point: if nothing else is available

1 star: Don't bother: wait until it's in the \$1 bin Bit of bad luck: Hit by a swerving gas truck on a two-lane road - on Wednesday.

She's devastated, of course. Linda goes to bed a lost and miserable woman.

But, whoa, come that morning, there's her husband as alive as could be. She's devastated, of course. Was it just a really bad dream? And another thing, it's only Monday (or maybe Tuesday ... I forgot to bring in my computer to make calculations for this one).

Linda is kind of messed up by now, but no more than any high-IQ suburban wife with two bright and active daughters.

The next morning, Linda wakes up to find a small and very grim crowd gathered in her living room, dressed in black. Did I mention they were very grim? There are unfamiliar lithium pills in the bathroom sink with her name on the label. Mirrors are covered over with blankets. A bottle of wine sits on her bed stand. And Linda's eldest daughter's face is covered in stitches.

More confounding than that: It's Saturday and the funeral - yes, Jim is still dead - is drawing near.

She's devastated, of course.

Like I said earlier, Linda Hanson is having a really bad week.

But so it goes. The days unfold out of order. Inexplicable events are made clear only when an earlier day arrives. Linda sorts out some questions, like Who is the blonde at the cemetery, lurking off in the distance? How did her daughter's face get so battered? How did the bloody dead crow end up in the backyard?

And, a biggie, how will an audience stay all the way to the end with this crazy patchwork reality quilt?

The one day Linda hasn't yet lived through is Wednesday, the day her husband dies. Or does he? I mean, does he have to?

Knowing what she now knows - including the fact that Jim tripled the coverage on his insurance policy the very morning he died - Linda finds herself grappling with such questions as "If I let him die, is that the same thing as killing him?" She also wonders if she can change destiny if she wanted to.

She consults with her local priest (who apparently moonlights as a really bad actor) and gets platitudes about knowing what you want to fight for and the power of faith to conquer all ... all of which contributes to the exceptionally cruel punch line that is the film's ending.

In another recent time warp picture, "The Lake House," Bullock lived in a dimension a few years removed from her pen pal, Keanu Reeves. Out of body, out of phase, out of time is how I felt about this one, too.

ALSO THIS WEEK

"Avenue Montaigne" (ThinkFilm, 3 1/2 stars) A real charmer with more heart and more Paris than the recent "Paris, je t'aime." At the intersection of a music hall, a theater and an auction house sits a bustling little bistro, Cafe des Artes, in which works a charming free-spirited waif named Jessica (Cecile De France). In the auction house, a wealthy businessman named Jacque (Claude Brasseur) is preparing to unload the contemporary art collection he spent a lifetime accumulating. In the theater, successful TV actress Catherine (Valerie Lemercier) reluctantly rehearses a Georges Feydeau play. In the concert hall, celebrated pianist Jean-Francois (Albert Dupontel) grapples with professional and personal demons. For each, Jessica's carefree presence seems to help in some indeterminate way as they unload their problems on her. Nothing too deep here. Just great characters, great acting and a story that flows like good wine. Other key characters include Frederic (Christopher Thompson) the estranged son of Jacque, who succumbs to Jessica's charms; Claudie (Dani) the theater manager who is about to retire; and Jessica's grandmother (the late Suzanne Flon). Watch for U.S. director Sydney Pollack in a key cameo as a movie producer in search of a star for his next film.

"Factory Girl" (Genius Products, 2 stars) Ostensibly, the story of the tragic uptown girl Edie Sedgwick (Sienna Miller) who succumbs to the allure of Andy Warhol (a credible Guy Pearce) and the whole 1960s artsy-drug scene. Edie became Warhol's muse in his communal studio-playpen known as The Factory. Hayden Christensen delivers another wooden performance as a Bob Dylan-like (thanks to Dylan's lawyers) character. The more you know about Edie, the less you like this highly fictionalized version of her life. Only performances by Miller and Pearce save it from itself.

And all the rest: Once again, because real life isn't scary enough, we offer Wes Craven's horror sequel, "The Hills Have Eyes II" and the graphic vampire film "Perfect Creature." For those who want a mindless carefree 87 minutes, try "Surf School." Those looking for an intellectual challenge should consider the intrigue-filled thriller in Vladan Nikolic's "Love." And finally, for the just plain love of the weird try the documentary "Okie Noodling" in which grown men catch giant catfish, lurking in muddy riverbank holes, with their bare hands.

IT CAME FROM TV

First season debuts on DVD: "Gunsmoke" which ran an incredible 20 seasons (1955-75); the Aaron Spelling-Leonard Goldberg production "The Rookies"; the IFC-TV insider comedy "The Business"; more IFC-TV funny stuff (in a hip, self-aware way) "The Minor Accomplishments of Jackie Woodman."

Season two of "The Incredible Hulk" and season four of the BET reality drama "College Hill: Virgin Islands." Also debuting, the recent PBS documentary and inside look "The Mormons" as well as the British TV classic "Hedda Gabler" (1981) with Dianna Rigg in the title role.

FROM THE VAULTS

"The Happy Hooker" (MGM, 1975) Nope, not the current D.C. Madame, Deborah Jeane Palfrey. Based on the memoir of Xaviera Hollander (who was portrayed in this film by Lynn Redgrave), Hollywood sanitized her life for the big screen and ended up with a dopey piec of kitsch. I guess it has an R rating because it is "about" sex, or rather sexual commerce. The film spawned two sequels, each drearier than the previous: "The

Happy Hooker Goes to Washington" (1977 starring Joey Heatherton) and "The Happy Hooker Goes to Hollywood" (1980, starring Martine Beswicke). All three are available this week, as is the one film that could make them all look really really good: "Showgirls: The Fully Exposed Edition!" (MGM, 1995) which single-handedly sank the careers of writer Joe Eszterhas and director Paul Verhoeven en route to becoming a cult favorite in some circles.

"Red Dawn Collector's Edition" (MGM, 1984) Dude, they invaded our country! Patrick Swayze, C. Thomas Howell and Charlie Sheen head for the hills to fight again and set America free. Cool what-if flick.

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