

Forces of Nature better than forecasted

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I hadn't seen Sandra Bullock since *Speed*, and I'm sorry to report she's lost quite a bit of the action in her Jackson that made her look robust enough to handle a flying bus. Now she's all cartilage, veins and a sternum in sharp relief, not to mention a fitting metaphor for *Forces of Nature*, whose mechanisms show too clearly to make a sleek and stirring whole. However, both Bullock and the movie come through more touching than expected.

Ben Affleck stars as Ben Holmes, a man traveling from New York to his wedding in Georgia a day after his fiancée, Bridget, played by Maura Tierney (*Newsradio*) leaves for Georgia. His flight doesn't take off, and his seat-mate Sara (Bullock) attaches herself to him as they both try to get to Savannah. Romantic complications ensue.

All the movie's stars turn in earnest and endearing perfor-

mances, making subtle moments work and only occasionally letting the sometimes schmaltzy script show through. The comedy is funny; the tragedy is sad; Ben Affleck is tall. There's not too much to dislike. Even the anti-marriage tirades Ben endures are offset by the happy senior couples on the charter bus he and Sara join.

The movie almost says some interesting things. By supplying a romantic distraction for Bridget, *Forces of Nature* almost delivers an analysis of the last-minute doubts both members of an engaged couple can experience. It also almost addresses how, while a man is likely to be drawn away from a relationship by something new and exciting, a woman is likely to be drawn away by something old and familiar.

Unfortunately, Bridget's old-and-familiar friend-from-youth love interest, Steve, degenerates from a vulnerable and appealing guy into an abrasive

leech. The movie would have benefited from exploring Bridget's misgivings more or not at all; the middle ground it does tread is disappointing and out of place.

The movie almost makes a statement about how, as is declared by that "Everybody's Free to Wear Sunscreen" song that I expect will be the "These Are the Days" of the class of '99, your choices are half chance—hence the forces of nature of the title that pervade and disrupt the characters' lives. As it is, this observation is packaged for your convenience in a few lines of dialogue toward the end.

A few details failed to suspend disbelief, including the gay bar in South Carolina (populated by men with hepcat hair and clothing) at which Ben and Sara (isn't that the couple in *Leaving Las Vegas*?) raise \$150 to buy a car (which, despite the cost, needs no repair and does not break down) at what must be a 24-hour car dealership.



There's also Blythe Danner's "Jawjah" accent, which she slings around as Bridget's mother. Ben and Sara drive up to the wedding in a downpour; when they arrive, they're dripping, but it hasn't rained on the wedding yet. Not to mention the fact that, although expecting a hurricane, the wedding does not attempt to move indoors.

Forces of Nature makes its film-history mark in the future of cinematic computer-generated imagery. Ben and Bridget

have a tender moment in regular-motion while the bridal party hurries indoors in slow-motion and various attractive debris floats around a la the *Forrest Gump* feather. Ben and Sara run around in computer-generated rain and hail, which I suppose you must do when working with actors insured for as much as these two.

A good date movie (nobody gets naked; the s-word flies once), *Forces of Nature* is more sun than rain. And everybody's free to wear sunscreen.

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