

'Our Brand is Crisis' plays it too safe

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Rating: <<< *out of 4 Stars*

Running Time: 107 min.

Based on the 2005 documentary of the same name, *Our Brand Is Crisis* fictionalizes the 2002 presidential election in Bolivia. Unlike the previous incarnation, the approach of this narrative is satiric. It makes for an unusual film; one that has to straddle the line between comedy and a serious tone, exposing a real and disturbing situation. Frankly, it's an uneasy mix. Some of it works thanks to the work of a strong cast, but it ultimately falls flat in its resolution.

'Calamity' Jane Bodine (Sandra Bullock) is a burnt-out political consultant, convinced to take on her toughest assignment yet - rescue the flailing campaign of US-backed Presidential candidate Pedro Gallo (Joaquim de Almeida). She's reluctant, but old habits die hard when she learns that a rival (Billy Bob Thornton) is running the show for the election frontrunner. Desperate to win, she heads to Bolivia and pulls out all of the stops, attempting to use a message of "crisis" and fear to motivate voters into backing her client.

The lead character is the actual villain of the piece and there's some darkly humorous material as the new campaign gets into full swing. This includes ridiculous political commercials that present the stiff Gallo as a savior to the people. The candidate himself is amusingly coached on how to appear more human and relatable on TV. And even dirtier tricks are employed as unfounded rumors are subtly spread to the media about Gallo's competitors. It all reaches a fevered pitch when campaign buses race each other down a perilous mountain road to get to the next town first.

For the most part, these scenes are when the movie is at its best, highlighting the absurdity and

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sneaking in some biting commentary. Bullock does well to make a flawed and at times nasty character both engaging and dynamic. Bodine is doing horrible things to good people, but the actress manages to display strong charm and a sense of gallows humor that keeps us watching. In fact, it's unfortunate, because her charisma could easily have taken viewers into an even darker and more scathing indictment of the CIA's attempts to influence an election in a foreign country.

And sadly, the film really comes undone in the in its final fifteen minutes. A tale like this needs to slap the viewer with the somber reality of what is happening. While it does happen, it all appears rushed and stilted. A quick moment of reflection and rapid change in character comes too quickly and too late to resonate emotionally or be believable. The movie attempts to tie up all of its loose ends and offer something of a redemption, but it feels false, considering the ugly chaos the character has unleashed. A much darker close would have been truer to the themes of the story.

Our Brand is Crisis has some funny moments and attempts to reveal some horrible truths about manipulations used by various parties to win an election. However, this adaptation ultimately plays it all in too safe and conventional a manner - it should have been darker and even more scathing towards both its central characters and the tricks of the trade.