

## THE PROPOSAL \_\_\_\_\_ (6.5/10)

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*Okay flick thanks to Betty White, some good lines*

*Written by Pete Chiarelli*

*Directed by Anne Fletcher*

Sandra Bullock ... Margaret Tate  
Ryan Reynolds ... Andrew Paxton  
Mary Steenburgen ... Grace Paxton  
Craig T. Nelson ... Joe Paxton  
Betty White ... Grandma Annie  
Denis O'Hare ... Mr. Gilbertson  
Malin Akerman ... Gertrude

*Margaret: "You touch my ass one more time I'll cut your balls off in your sleep. Understand?"*

*Andrew: "Yeah."*

*Margaret: "You're such a good fiance."*

### ***Not your father's romantic comedy***

The above quote isn't one of the better examples of the generally clever dialog in *The Proposal*, which has one of the more distinct plot gimmicks of the romantic comedy genre: A Type-A New York publishing editor, Margaret Tate (Sandra Bullock), faces deportation to Canada and spur-of-the-moment seizes on the idea of marrying her personal assistant Andrew Paxton (Ryan Reynolds) to secure US citizenship.

Then, in my humble opinion, most of the online panners are too harsh about the movie being otherwise formulaic. After zillions of romantic comedies, which of them isn't formulaic?!

I mean there's a meet cute, an unlikely basis for the relationship, usually overcome at the outset, then another conflict of understanding, some interesting friends and family, special settings, the final dawning that the couple is meant to be together, a final pursuit and a coming together in resolution. I'm sure they have the key elements of romantic comedies—or any other form of cinema—finely detailed in film school, but what I'm writing has to be fairly consistent with the formal description.

So I guess my point is that when one is reviewing movies or books or pretty much anything else in the world of art, one has to accept that "it's all been done before." In a way, everything is a formula, i.e. a series of equations that represent reality. What makes one movie shine over another is the "how" of writing them... and the quality of the variables. In algebra you can say  $x + y = z$ , for all x's and y's, but in the real world, not all x's are the same and not all y's are the same. If we're talking of the two principals, Ryan Reynolds as x and Sandra Bullock as y, then let's give them their due as unique persons.

### ***Sandra Bullock: Love her or hate her***

So why does this actress—who basically launched her stardom with the one-two punch of *Demolition Man* with Sylvester Stallone in 1993 then the blockbuster *Speed* with Keanu Reeves in 1994—inspire such loyalty or antagonism?

I have a friend who constantly accuses me of exalting the acting abilities of both Sandra Bullock and Keanu Reeves, it's been kind of a running joke. But while I don't think either

of them is an imminent threat to win an Oscar, neither are they dregs from emergency casting. For example, in the ensemble movie *Crash*, Bullock does a terrific job as the emotionally cut off wife of the district attorney. For comic pieces—e.g. *Demolition Man*, *Miss Congeniality*—her sense of timing is impeccable, and she goes a long way toward making these movies work.

Here in *The Proposal* she makes an admirable effort toward playing the dictatorial superbitch editor from Hell, then making the requisite character changes as events unfold. Does the character make sense? Well, you be the judge. But if it doesn't work, you should question the writer's imagination or Bullock's creative choices but not her acting ability.

In the case of Ryan Reynolds, we're dealing with an entirely different set of qualities. About 12 years junior to Ms. Bullock, he seems to be a hot property in Hollywood these days... kind of an American Hugh Grant for the next generation. [In the theater, the number of teenage girls and young women vastly outnumbered the other categories of persons... and I don't think they were there in appreciation of Sandra B's comic timing.] The reality of his role, to me, is at least as difficult to fathom as Sandra Bullock's. We're supposed to believe this good-looking, fit, articulate ladies' man *du jour* would be working as a devoted personal assistant for a 45-year-old shrew simply to get ahead in the elevated world of New York authorship?

His devotion borders on the slavish.

So my take as a movie logician is we have some very unlikely premises in this particular formula.

### ***So does the movie work, anyway?***

Yes, definitely, kinda sorta. By suspending a chunky-soup portion of disbelief and paying attention to the dialog—which unlike the premises, is crisp and clever—an optimistic viewer hoping the vessel is half full will be rewarded by the insertion of family, especially Andrew's Granny Annie (Betty White). Family is more or less the theme that carries the story along with a modicum of grace. Margaret has virtually no family, while Andrew has this whole Alaskan island full of it, and friends. He's the only son of this dynasty, and his old man Joe (Craig T. Nelson) is majorly pissed that Only Son ran off to New York for what Pop sees as light and literary reasons.

Believe it or not, time after time as Granny (White) enters a scene, her personality transforms the movie from a mild disappointment to a celebration of young love and young life. And the writers give her plenty of material, from the "babymaker" blanket she made for the connubial couple to her self-constructed Indian fertility dances in the woods.

A pure joy she is.

Oddly enough, the other movie we were going to see, *The Hangover*, which was rated much higher by Rotten Tomatoes, turns out to have been just about everything I've come to loath about contempo crappo moviedom... probably starting with the early Adam Sandler flicks or Tom Green schtick. [Believe me, this disdain has little to do with my approaching the big Six-Zero milestone (I think); I'm wagering the majority of my neefs (nieces and nephews) and their peers have tired of the modern grossout genre, too.]

Anyway, *The Hangover* was reviewed by, of all people, Mitch Albom—I wrote an open letter to Mr. Albom recently—today, from the point of view of wondering why parents would go to such a movie with their 9-year-old kids! According to Mitch, the movie is a crude, funny, wild episode of a Las Vegas bachelor party that none of the participants can remember: "As the movie goes on they reconstruct a night that includes sex, blood, strippers, used condoms, and a frontally naked man locked in a trunk." Then apparently toward the end of the movie, "there are shots of a man and an old woman engaged in oral sex."

What's up with that? Not proper fare for 9-year-olds; nor, come to think of it, for 60-year-olds either.

I'm glad we went to see *The Proposal*. Flawed but light, conveying a reasonably positive sense of life.

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*The Proposal | Sandra Bullock | Ryan Reynolds | Betty White | Alaska movie*