

50 MPH: EPISODE 11

“A CRASH COURSE IN SANDRA BULLOCK” (with Kate Erbland)

Transcript (00:49:26)



KRIS TAPLEY

This is *50 MPH*!

[INTRO MUSIC]

DENNIS HOPPER (as “Howard Payne”)

Pop quiz, hotshot!

DENNIS HOPPER (as “Howard Payne”)

There’s a bomb on a bus.

JEFF DANIELS (as “Harry Temple”)

You’re deeply nuts, you know that?

DENNIS HOPPER (as “Howard Payne”)

Once the bus goes fifty miles an hour, the bomb is armed.

SANDRA BULLOCK (as “Annie”)

Stay on or get off?

DENNIS HOPPER (as “Howard Payne”)

If it drops below fifty...

SANDRA BULLOCK (as “Annie”)

Stay on or get off?!

DENNIS HOPPER (as “Howard Payne”)

...it blows up.

ALAN RUCK (as “Stephens”)

Oh, darn.

DENNIS HOPPER (as “Howard Payne”)

What do you do?

KEANU REEVES (as “Jack Traven”)

You have a hair trigger aimed at your head. What do you do?

DENNIS HOPPER (as “Howard Payne”)

What do you do?!

KEANU REEVES (as “Jack Traven”)

What do you do?

KRIS TAPLEY

I'm your host, Kris Tapley, and you're listening to an oral history of director Jan de Bont's 1994 summer blockbuster, *Speed*, straight from the people who made it happen. Now, don't forget to fasten your seatbelts. Let's hit the road!

KRIS TAPLEY

Welcome back, everyone, and yet another detour today. We're going to talk about Sandra Bullock. And I've dragged another of our esteemed critics and journalists into the fray with me today. I'm here with Kate Erbland, the executive editor of film at *IndieWire*. She runs the section and also does reviews and interviews and she's a member of the New York Film Critics Circle. You've also read her stuff at *Rolling Stone*, *Vanity Fair* and *Cosmopolitan*. Kate, thanks for coming on.

KATE ERBLAND

Kris, thank you so much for having me.

KRIS TAPLEY

So, yes, Sandra Bullock. I'm going to run through the requisite bio information real quick. Sandra Bullock was born July 26 1964, which makes her a Leo. She was born in Arlington County, Virginia, which is near where I was born. And that's going to matter in a minute, I promise. She's a military brat, daughter of an opera singer and of an army employee. Her dad was, like, part of the military postal service and later was a Pentagon contractor. She was raised in Germany and Austria for 12 years. She went to East Carolina University, also my neck of the woods, out in Wilson, North Carolina. And then she moved to New York to pursue acting. Now, I'm going to run through her early career real quick because her career kind of starts with *Speed*, obviously. But, you know, she had been around, so let's talk about what got her to this point. She had, similar to Keanu, a number of "significant other" roles, I guess. She started with *Hangmen*, which was a straight-to-video movie here, but it actually played Cannes, oddly enough, in 1987. She did a lot of TV things. *The Preppy Murder* was a TV movie she did. She got a bigger break in something called *Bionic Showdown* with Lee Majors and Lindsay Wagner, the Six Million Dollar Man and the Bionic Woman. She was kind of a Bionic Woman Jr. She was like a younger, bionically-enhanced — I mean, it was like *Muppet Babies* for the Six Million Dollar Man and Bionic Woman, like, you know, these younger versions of that, and it was supposed to be a backdoor pilot for a series featuring her that never materialized. And then she did get a series in *Working Girl*,

1990, based on the 1988 Mike Nichols movie. Twelve episodes, one season and done. All the while, she's doing some movies and she does *Love Potion No. 9* in 1992, which is her big studio breakthrough. It did not make her popular among the Fox business affairs folks, as everyone learned in the last episode. 1993 was a big year. *The Vanishing* with Jeff Bridges. She gets kind of taken out immediately at the beginning of that movie, but she is present in a photograph throughout. But she's really good opposite Jeff at the beginning of that. She's in *The Thing Called Love*, Peter Bogdanovich. She's in this movie called *Fire on the Amazon* that's not good. *Wrestling Ernest Hemingway* with Robert Duvall. And the movie that would actually sort of allow Fox to convince themselves that she could do an action movie is *Demolition Man*, where she kind of fills in for Lori Petty, who clashed creatively. Who knew? Creative clashes on the set of *Demolition Man*. I love that movie, though, as I said last week. And then we get to *Speed*. So, this is where we are in the timeline of *50 MPH*. We've finally hired our Annie and it's Sandra Bullock, fresh off of *Demolition Man* and this year I just explained of 1993. And let's go. We're going to talk about her in *Speed* immediately here, as opposed to Keanu, who had a bit of career going already, and certainly Dennis Hopper, who we'll talk about in a couple of weeks, who was approaching the twilight of his career. Sandy is ready to — I say Sandy, like she's my buddy, but she is my buddy! Sandy is ready to explode and *Speed* does it. So, Kate, I'm going to shut up now and ask you. What do you think *Speed* represents in her career and kind of setting her up for the career she would have?

KATE ERBLAND

Well, it was funny when I was starting to think about talking to you about this, I think people who weren't super familiar with her probably thought, "Oh, she's coming out of nowhere. Who is this girl?" But as you mentioned, she just starred in a film with Sylvester Stallone, which can be a sort of fraught experience, and she holds her own and she's kind of competent but ditzy. She's playing this future cop who doesn't understand the world that Stallone comes from. And so, it's sort of an interesting mix for her that we see in *Speed*. She's competent, but she's a little silly. I mean, she's the one who's driving the bus the entire time. Not just anyone can do that. So, you know, she comes on board. I'm sure you've mentioned she was cast pretty late. I was diving back into some of the journalistic archives to see when she was cast and what that was like. And then, all of a sudden, it's like, she's a movie star. She's, like, a fully-formed movie star. And it's not just, "Oh, she's great at this." All of a sudden — she's also a really great business person, which I think we could probably talk more about — but all of a sudden, she is rocketed into the upper echelon of not just female movie stars, but Hollywood movie stars, because she's just so good. And she and Keanu were so good. But again, she has a competence level that she's believable as someone who can handle this kind of stuff. But she's still very charming, still has, like, an everywoman thing going on. But also, you know she's not an everywoman. Not everyone can do the kind of stuff that she does in most of her films, and specifically in *Speed*.

KRIS TAPLEY

Yeah, it's funny you mentioned about the what the experience of a Sly movie can be, especially that one, I remember interviewing Denis Leary about that movie, and he was

like, "The amenities on this movie were out of control." Like, Sly — Sly, my buddy — he traveled with a portable driving range, like, it was just, you know, out of control. And so, yeah, to be thrust into that movie, again, replacing another actress, and show whatever resilience she did to be in the movie and really just leave an impression, absolutely, it set her up perfectly for this. And, God, the role, as I've talked about, was originally a number of things. An ambulance driver, who was popping pain meds, named Darlene. A stand-up comedian who taught, like, a driving school. And eventually, she's just a graphic designer, which you would only know from a deleted scene on the DVD, and she's just on the bus. And it's not about where she's — it's not about where any of these people are coming from, ultimately. Nobody has a backstory, right? So, you have to supply a life. And she supplies so much life. She is exactly the kind of comedian, so to speak, that the movie needed, without being a comedian, you know? It's all about personality. And I mean, look, this is all the stuff that, a year later, Vanity Fair would dub her "America's Sweetheart," right? What does that mean to you, by the way, when you see "America's Sweetheart" as it pertains to Sandra Bullock?

KATE ERBLAND

Well, I just want to go back. One thing that you said about you don't really get a lot of backstory, but Sandy, my friend Sandy, does manage to provide a sense that she is obviously — she's very familiar with the bus driver, she's familiar with the other riders, this is a usual route for them. And so, even if you're not getting, you're not hearing a lot, you understand something about the relationship that these people have with each other. And I think she does that in such a great way that it is not forced, and I think another actress, it would feel too over-the-top, like, "Oh, my great friend, the bus driver." And it's just, like, it's very relatable and easy. These people are part of her life, and now her life has been totally upended. But as far as America's Sweetheart, I don't know, it's like a like an "it" girl thing. Like, what does it mean? In the moment, it's just, oh, everyone loves you. Everyone knows you. But it's another way to talk about someone being a commodity and being sellable and bankable, which she is, was and has been pretty much since Speed.

KRIS TAPLEY

Yeah, I mean, I guess it's the girl next door thing as a quality. They've tried over the years — they did with *Love Potion No. 9*, and certainly since then, they've tried the ugly-duckling thing with her that, in my opinion, never takes. It's like, she's too gorgeous for that to really happen and it's really funny and *Love Potion No. 9* because I think she's got some weird teeth in and stuff and it's just a whole thing. But yeah, it's just that relatable thing, that down-to-earth quality, which was actually in keeping with the entire movie. I mean, the action hero was a down-to-earth guy. He's not some muscle-bound Commando. You know, there's a quality about all of the bus passengers. They're not, like, extras in the background. They're just kind of regular people who feel like they're actually on the bus. So, this sort of realism that is a consistent refrain on this podcast, it's inherent in her as well. I've taken to calling the previous episode "A Star Is Born," because if there is that kind of moment with this movie, it's obviously her. And so, she's she speeds out of this movie just a full-blown star. There's one other movie she did in

'94 called *Me & the Mob*, by the way, aka *Who Do I Gotta Kill?* Let's just say after *Speed*, she wouldn't be doing any more movies like this. It's something.

KATE ERBLAND

She wishes she could kill the people who made that movie so no one will talk about it again.

KRIS TAPLEY

There you go. Well, I don't think anyone does. I mean, frankly it was just like on IMDb, like, what is this one, and I looked up her one or two scenes and was like, "Got it." But she's, she's Miss Rom-Com immediately after this. You know, she does, like, *While You Were Sleeping*. It becomes, like, the one she did with so-and-so. It's like, there's the one she did with Bill Pullman, the one she did with Denis Leary, the one she did with Chris O'Donnell, the one she did with Harry Connick Jr. Like, it's sort of these tandems. There's *While You Were Sleeping* with Pullman. There's *Two If By Sea*, which is not good, but there's a pulse there, at least. Denis Leary wrote it, I think. With him. Chris O'Donnell as Ernest Hemingway — I never saw *In Love and War*. I don't know if you did.

KATE ERBLAND

So, thinking back, I did not rewatch it for our discussion, but I definitely saw it when it came out. Because I think — you know, this is for another podcast — I was huge obsessed with Chris O'Donnell. Huge. And it is very much not a rom com but it is a romance. And they're fine. It's fine.

KRIS TAPLEY

Big *Three Musketeers* fan or big *Batman Forever* fan?

KATE ERBLAND

Both. Oh, huge, huge, like embarrassingly so.

KRIS TAPLEY

OK. Had the posters up and everything.

KATE ERBLAND

I had trading cards. What was I doing with creating cards? Putting them under my pillow.

KRIS TAPLEY

I wish they had *In Love and War* trading cards. That would have been something. Chris O'Donnell as Ernest Hemingway. I just had to say that again, because it's hilarious. *Hope Floats*, Harry Connick Jr. I think I saw this when it came out. I certainly didn't watch it in preparation for this. But I watched the trailer which has Lightning Crashes in it from *Live*, which I thought was funny.

KATE ERBLAND

It's kind of charming. It's like, there is a romance going on. But it's also about her trying to find herself after her husband leaves her, like, very embarrassingly on sort of a Maury Povich-type show. And she comes back to her small southern town and Harry Connick Jr. has been waiting for her the whole time. And so, that's part of it, but it's also her, you know, coming back into her womanhood and becoming a better mother, a better daughter. It's pretty good. I, you know, I'm kind of a fan of that one I'd say.

KRIS TAPLEY

Well, it was Forest Whitaker, too. I mean, he's a good director and I should maybe give *Hope Floats* a better shot. But this was 1998 and I was in high school and probably didn't want to see *Hope Floats*.

KATE ERBLAND

No. It was not for you.

KRIS TAPLEY

It was not for me. But they had some more interesting roles out there for her. I mean, *The Net*, we spoke offline about this, you say it doesn't really hold up. I just remember liking it a lot when I was a kid, but it's probably the first, like, movie-star role she gets coming out of *Speed*, like, leading the charge on what is ostensibly a popular piece of, you know, material.

KATE ERBLAND

That's really, like, that's a Sandra Bullock movie. She is the star. It's centered on her. And I was the same as you like, I remembered liking it at the time. I think I rewatched it on TV a few times, years and years ago. The last time I watched part of it on TV within the last year, it wasn't even like, "Oh, this is dated," because it's obviously very dated. But like the pacing was bad and it was sort of just trying to put her into a box that I don't think suits her, which is sort of, like, this slick hacker type who gets caught up in something else. And that's pretty far afield from, you know, this everywoman thing that we're talking about, even though it did have that same competence level that she always has, which I love.

KRIS TAPLEY

Well, it's also worth it to find the boundaries, right? At this stage in your career, like, what can you do? What can't you do? What does look good on you? What doesn't look good on you, material wise. *A Time to Kill* is a good role for her. You know, she's sort of — is she sort of third wheel to Ashley Judd and Matthew McConaughey in that, would you say? Kind of the third — because I'm trying to remember. I mean, it's like Ashley Judd plays his wife. I just remember her, she's like helping.

KATE ERBLAND

She's like a young law student who has stumbled in to this horrible thing and is helping out Matthew McConaughey. And obviously, Matthew McConaughey, his character has this really wonderful, emotional, pretty sexy marriage with Ashley Judd. So, there's not

even — I think there's one moment where someone mistakes their relationship, but it's not a romantic thing. And I think that's actually pretty interesting to have a film that is led by a man and two women and it's not a love triangle.

KRIS TAPLEY

Yeah, exactly. I remember a lot of sweat in that movie.

KATE ERBLAND

Yeah, a lot of sweat. I mean, it's a Joel Schumacher film.

KRIS TAPLEY

It's a Joel Schumacher film in the south and McConaughey is blowing up then, too. I mean, that's the movie that sort of sends him on his way as a leading man. And Ashley Judd is obviously starting to blow up there, too. So, it's interesting to have the three of them in that movie. But what I'm curious about, I want to ask you about, is just in this immediate wake of *Speed*, before the, let's call it, disaster of *Speed 2*. What kind of a career does it look like to you she's trying to put together? You know, we've got *While You Were Sleeping*, *Two If By Sea*, *In Love and War*, *Hope Floats* is after *Speed 2* but *The Net*, *A Time to Kill*. What does that look like to you?

KATE ERBLAND

I mean, I think what's striking about it is how varied it is. And like you said, she's trying to find, you know, the boundaries and the margins of what she's good in and what people respond to. And, I mean, like I said, when she came out of *Speed* and she was such a major star, I was reading these old articles and it was all about her bankability and how much money she can start commanding for her roles. But she didn't really have a lot of female peers. It was more of a male trajectory. And I think she continued to do that in an interesting way by doing different things instead of doing what probably more men would do, which is just, like, more action roles. She wanted to do different things. So, she's taking a sort of typically male stardom rise and putting her own spin on it, which I think was pretty bold to do right out the gate instead of, you know, I'm sure she was tossed all kinds of *Speed* wannabes and lookalikes and she didn't really do those. I mean, the most comparable one would maybe be *The Net* because it's an action film, sort of. And like I said, it's, you know — it doesn't really work for me, but I think she never did anything like that again. So, she probably also realized, "Hey, this, isn't it."

KRIS TAPLEY

Well, she will very quickly learn what works and kind of keep going back to that well, actually, but *Speed 2* happens. We could just leave it at that. Everyone should have walked away the moment Keanu Reeves said no. It lost a ton of money. It's creatively bankrupt. I will deal with this movie later in this project, but she's the one, though, in that movie, right? Like, it's not a Keanu Reeves vehicle. *Speed 2* is a Sandra Bullock vehicle and Jason Patric is just kind of there.

KATE ERBLAND

Well, I just I love the way that they, you know, obviously very quickly rewrote it without Keanu where just, like, yes, she and Jack have broken up. But she's dating another cop who gets into crazy situations. And I guess she's just got a type.

KRIS TAPLEY

Whose boss is also Joe Morton-

KATE ERBLAND

It's so weird!

KRIS TAPLEY

-who told them to take his name off of the movie, by the way.

KATE ERBLAND

It's such a small world. She has a type. You can't keep her away from these guys.

KRIS TAPLEY

Totally. But one thing about that movie that I will drill into a little bit here, because it pertains to her, is they ruined her character. She's suddenly a bit of a damsel at this point. She's got so much agency in the first movie, and then in this one, they just — I don't know how you lose sight of that thread with that character, but they completely did and it's almost like she's a different person to me.

KATE ERBLAND

She's very ditz. And I think she's, like, really hung up on Jason Patric's character proposing to her. Like, she becomes very much just, like, you know, I guess not a wife guy, like a husband girl, where that's all she is about. And Jason Patric becomes, like, the action star of this. He's off saving everyone. He's saving that deaf girl. And it's just like, they kept the character like Jack, but they didn't keep the character of Annie, which is the actual character that they have.

KRIS TAPLEY

It's a pity, but we'll get more into it later. Around this time, though, very quickly, she's starting to think like a producer and becomes a producer. She launches Fortis Films, her shingle. She didn't produce *Practical Magic* but Fortis Films was a production company on it. What a weird movie, by the way. I saw it for the first time recently. Her and Nicole Kidman.

KATE ERBLAND

I think it's an interesting choice for them to be sisters. They're sister witches who have pursued different paths in life and they sort of come back together to help cover up the death, murder — definitely death, maybe murder of Nicole Kidman's abusive boyfriend and they use magic and spells and Aidan Quinn's there and they fall in love

KRIS TAPLEY

Aidan Quinn's there, yes.

KATE ERBLAND

Yeah, he's there. I think it's a strange movie. I remember watching it a lot on TV when I was younger, and it is a good sort of romance. Like, I think that Sandy and Aidan have great chemistry and it has all these, like, incredible Stevie Nicks songs that that's the first time I heard them, so that's a major plus. But it is maybe the boundaries of her romantic possibilities, where it's like, there's all this other stuff going on and it doesn't totally work. And then it's like this whole girl power thing about, like, oh, witches. We're going to get it done. Very strange.

KRIS TAPLEY

Well, the Spice Girls are blowing up the charts at that point. So, you know. Directed by Griffin Dunne, bizarrely.

KATE ERBLAND

Bizarrely.

KRIS TAPLEY

It's strange. But yeah, she's becoming a multi-hyphenate at this point. She produces *Gun Shy* in 2000. She also does *28 Days* in 2000, which is, you know, has more meat on its bones as roles go. She plays an addict and it's sort of a little bit of an ensemble like a *Cuckoo's Nest* kind of thing. But then right back into the rom-coms. I mean, in '99, just to go back a year, she is — it's the one she does with Ben Affleck. I find it to be sort of lazy, manic pixie dream girl territory, very 1999

KATE ERBLAND

Derogatory. Said in a derogatory way.

KRIS TAPLEY

Absolutely. And then in 2000, again, she does *Miss Congeniality*, and this is the one that kind of launches her into another status, I guess. You know, it makes over \$200 million at the box office worldwide, but she produced it. It's the first romantic comedy she does, I guess, that leans into her as just having more of a stronger presence than just being that character in that kind of movie, you know? She's this force of will on the police force who has to go undercover — it sounds ridiculous, right — has to go undercover at a beauty pageant, and she crushes it. And I, you know, I don't know if this is thirsty, but there's that shot that they certainly play up of her walking out in that tight, slinky dress, and it's like, "Oh, Sandra Bullock is a sex symbol all of a sudden," in a way that she certainly wasn't. She was kind of the cute girl next door, the America's Sweetheart thing, and then this movie really flips that light on a little more, right? I'm going to let you take that.

KATE ERBLAND

Well, it's funny that it does at first play up that *Love Potion No. 9* ugly duckling thing where it's like, she has these, like, horrible eyebrows and she's just like a total mess, which is something she sort of goes back to for *The Heat* in its own way. But yeah, it's like, oh, she's such an ugly duckling. But it's the same thing where it's like, no, she's not. She's absolutely gorgeous. She is the only person who can do the specific thing that she's asked to do. She's really competent. She's really smart. She's been underestimated. And she's super fun to watch. And, like, that's a film that, out of most of these, just really holds up. It's still so funny and so charming because she's so funny and so charming.

KRIS TAPLEY

Yeah, and the premise is tight, like it doesn't lose itself. It's not like, full of just, like, why would that happen? Why would that happen? No, you're kind of with it the whole time. She does *Two Weeks Notice* with Hugh Grant. Another \$200 million easy.

KATE ERBLAND

Can I just do my *Two Weeks Notice* thing? For me, *Two Weeks Notice* and also *Music and Lyrics*, both starring Hugh Grant, these are these, like, early-aughts rom-coms where the genre was dying and it felt like every studio had, like, a wall in an office where it'd be like names as men and names of women and, you know, stupid ideas and they're just throwing darts. And it's like Hugh Grant, Sandra Bullock, she's a lawyer, but also his assistant. He's rich, she's poor. And it's just, like, so by-the-numbers and it does not really work. Although she does get away with some pretty great physical comedy. Like, there is an entire sequence there about her having to poop her pants, which is something that not many people could make charming and relatable instead of, like, gross.

KRIS TAPLEY

That's true. She does start to break out the physical comedy around now, with *Miss Congeniality* as well, just a bit about falling with wearing the heels and tripping and stuff like that. But *Two Weeks Notice*, that was the first movie, I discovered, assuming Wikipedia is gospel, the first movie to shoot in New York after 9/11.

KATE ERBLAND

I feel like I've heard that before. I think that's right. Yeah, definitely shot in New York. She's from Coney Island and, like, they're always shooting there.

KRIS TAPLEY

She does these two movies in 2002, *Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood* and *Murder by Numbers*. I look at that and I see Callie Khouri and I see Barbet Schroeder and I'm like, "Oh, you want to work with Callie Khouri and Barbet Schroeder." Not to, you know, disparage the movies or the material or anything but it's just like, OK, you want to work with filmmakers like this. You're a multi-hyphenate now. You're producing. She's producing the George Lopez sitcom for, like, five years at this point, which is interesting. She does a sequel to *Miss Congeniality* in 2005, naturally. Go back to the

well on that one. I actually never saw that one, but it feels to me like there will be a third one one day. Like, how do you not go back to that at some point?

KATE ERBLAND

Inevitably.

KRIS TAPLEY

Then in 2005 also, you know, as much as it's hated, probably because of what it beat at the Oscars, everybody comes out of *Crash* unscathed, by the way. Brendan Fraser just won an Oscar. Matt Dillon was nominated at the time, he was fine. Sandra Bullock, though, when she's in that movie, she gives that the lift, the prestige lift, I guess, that it needed, because she's sort of the star of the movie, right? As far as just like, I mean — it's clearly an ensemble, and obviously everybody has their thing, but her journey is sort of, like, the journey that the movie sort of wants you to latch onto, I feel like. That's my memory anyway.

KATE ERBLAND

Yeah, it's the one that the movie wants you to care about the most, or at least, you know, sort of reflect the audience a little more. But yeah, I mean, like you said, people still talk badly about the film. But you said, no one came out of it particularly being like, "Oh, she was in *Crash*. It's over for her."

KRIS TAPLEY

Yeah, it's not a blemish on anybody's career. And also, the role she's playing, you know, she's a racist. It's dramatic. It's heavy. It's nothing we've seen her really do at this point. So, it is sort of a, you know, she's been zigging and now she zags and does this and it's interesting. It's an interesting choice for her. And it's the first movie she's in that's nominated for Best Picture. She will ultimately be in four. *The Lake House*, 2006. Finally, Keanu and Sandra together again, and I have no fucking idea what happened in this movie.

KATE ERBLAND

I mean, you and I have been talking about this offline, that I don't really vibe with time-travel romances, because there's so many rules. And this is a film that has rules, and some of them are just, like, really stupid. Like, it's a magical mailbox. OK. And, of course, it's great to see them together, but, like, we only see them together in certain points in the film, because it's about their different journeys to get to each other at different points in time. So, you know, you can say, "Oh, it's Keanu and Sandy back together again," but is it really?

KRIS TAPLEY

I don't understand it. I don't understand it. Even when they're together, I'm like, "Are they actually together here? Is this like a device?" Like, there's just moments in that movie that I felt like an idiot watching that movie. I was just, like, "I can't piece this together." And I hate that it sounds like, at this point, by the way, that I'm dumping on a

lot of her filmography. But she is always the spark in a lot of these movies, by the way, so it is not to take anything from her. But that one. Yeah.

KATE ERBLAND

I mean, I will say she brings sort of, like, weird gravitas to some parts. Like, I can remember now, so specifically, that scene at the end where she realizes what's going on and what the rules are and she, like, goes to the mailbox and she's, like, crying and she puts the letter in and she's like, "Just wait. Just wait." And she's, like, kneeling there and holding this mailbox crying and it's, you know, on its face, it's absurd, but she's really selling it.

KRIS TAPLEY

Yeah. And I again, I have no idea what was going on there. I mean, I do. Like, she's trying to keep him from dying or whatever.

KATE ERBLAND

It's a magic lake house. A magic mailbox.

KRIS TAPLEY

It's like the photograph in *Back to the Future* or something. It's weird. She does *Infamous*. She plays Harper Lee. Meanwhile, Catherine Keener is playing Harper Lee over in *Capote*. The dueling Capote movies of that year. *Premonition*, cool poster. Never saw the movie. 2009 is the breakout year for her I think as far as, like, this stage in her career. The biggest year I think she had since '93, anyway. She does *The Proposal* — the one she does with Ryan Reynolds. But I don't want to disparage that one, either, because I actually like that one a lot. It's better than the other rom-coms. Part of that is, again, it's a stronger role. She's playing this, you know, taskmaster boss of Ryan Reynolds who is going to be deported back to Canada, because there's something Canadian about Sandy. And so, she kind of forces him to go through a sham marriage and they fall in love along the way. And it works.

KATE ERBLAND

It works. They're adorable together and she is very believable as this very sort of hardened career woman who doesn't have time for anything else and has to go along with this increasingly bizarre, you know, sham relationship where they have to go to Alaska and Betty White's there. A small dog is almost eaten by an eagle. So, again more physical comedy. She's running around with that dog. But she's just — she's believable in a role that could be a little silly where it's like, oh.

KRIS TAPLEY

Not only that, she's out in the woods dancing with Betty White. I almost said Bette Davis. That would have been something.

KATE ERBLAND

What was the song? It's from the window-

KRIS TAPLEY

"Get Low."

KATE ERBLAND

Oh, yes.

KRIS TAPLEY

She cracks me up in that scene, by the way. There's something about the way she's dancing and the look on her face. Like, she's playing both — I'm really getting deep into analyzing *The Proposal*, but she's playing both, like, a hardened, kind of like, as you say, on her face, while going through the motions of this thing with Betty White physically, and it's just — I don't know, it's a funny clash of things going on there. That year she also does *All About Steve*, which I finally saw.

KATE ERBLAND

This is all you.

KRIS TAPLEY

Yeah, I'll take this one. This is the one she does with Bradley Cooper. This is Hangover-era, Bradley Cooper, and his voice is basically still cracking. He's going through puberty or something. But no, it's a bad movie. It's a bad screenplay, actually, because it's a totally watchable movie. Like, I might — I'm not going to die on the hill of *All About Steve*, but I might defend it. Because I was cackling. She plays this — she and the movie are cringy by design, OK? Which, therefore, I think the joke is on the Razzie Awards, which is a just despicable organization, in my view, but it won all their, quote, awards that year and she showed up to accept her Razzie for either worst film or worst actress or whatever. And, you know, that's a lot easier to do, by the way, when you're accepting an Oscar the next night, which I'm going to get to in a second, but yeah, *All About Steve*, she plays this kind of cringy girl who makes crossword puzzles. Like, that's her job. And so, she's got a head full of just useless knowledge that she's always throwing out and she's obsessed with this guy Steve, played by Bradley Cooper. I mean, who isn't? And she's just sort of stalker-y. And then there's a whole plot about some kids falling into a mineshaft and she falls in there and then the entire community like loves her suddenly and, look, it's a bad screenplay. But she's good and Bradley's actually good and Thomas Haden Church is hilarious. I mean, he's very Thomas Haden Church-y in it. But yeah, I'm not going to — again, I'm not going to die on this hill. But Beth Grant told me, "An unfairly maligned movie." She plays her mom in it. Beth Grant is the bus passenger who dies midway through *Speed*. And, yeah, you know, it didn't deserve all that hate. There's always something, though, that is the sort of target of ire. But, like I said, the next night, she's accepting an Oscar for *The Blind Side*, which was also a Best Picture nominee. She plays the adoptive mother of a football player who's, you know, on the verge of — I guess he eventually gets drafted by the NFL, by the Ravens, but he's in college at the time at Ole Miss. And, you know, just a fiery performance. The kind of performance that wins Oscars. The kind of performance that wins Oscars for an actor like Sandra Bullock at this stage in her career, too, right? It's a

little transformative, because she does the hair thing, the big hair thing. And, you know, there's just — there's a southern grit to it that she probably tapped into very easily.

KATE ERBLAND

She's playing this, like, mama bear role that we're not used to seeing her play.

KRIS TAPLEY

Yeah. Just cruises through the season. It's one of those — you know, you and I are no strangers to Oscar season. It's one of those things where it's, like, from beginning to end, it's like, "Yep, this is going to be her year." And I remember when she won the Oscar, she gets on stage and she says, "Did I actually win this, or did I just wear y'all down?" And talk about a knowing comment. I've always loved it for that, because that is exactly what that grind feels like and it was not lost on her. But she deserved the love. I'm not going to look at the nominations and be like, "Oh, so and so deserved it instead," but it was a good time to give her some love. The movie was a huge hit. Like, the level of hit that it was a sort of what drove it to a Best Picture nomination. I mean, that and the performance, certainly. And who played her husband? Tim McGraw? No.

KATE ERBLAND

It's been so long.

KRIS TAPLEY

Yeah, Tim McGraw. It was Tim, because he also was in *Friday Night Lights*. So, he's, like, Mr. Football. But yeah, Tim McGraw plays her husband, and it's a fine movie. I mean, it's a John Lee Hancock movie. Let's say that. You got anything special to add to that?

KATE ERBLAND

No. I mean, it's sort of what you're kind of dancing around. It was sort of, like, at the time, it was that kind of Oscar bait. But I think she hit so well because it is not something we're used to seeing from her, but it also taps into stuff we are used to seeing. As you mentioned, the southern stuff was probably easy for her to channel on a personal level and, you know, she really is the center of the film and she's got this grit and this drive and she's very passionate and you're on her side you want her and her family and Michael to succeed and I think that's, you know — that's no small feat. And I think that's why it was recognized at that time. You know, it was the time for that. And as you mentioned, she seemed to notice that and know that and, you know, good for her.

KRIS TAPLEY

Fun fact about the Oscars that year, by the way, Keanu Reeves presented *The Hurt Locker*. You know, they present each of the Best Picture nominees. I seem to recall he presented *The Hurt Locker*, which was fun because of the Bigelow connection. And Sandra is about to win Best Actress. So, maybe they should have *The Lake House 2* at some point. Or *Speed 3*.

KATE ERBLAND

The Lake House 2?

KRIS TAPLEY

They should close off that trilogy, though. They need to do something else together that's good. *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, she's in that. Another Best Picture nominee. A strange movie, not a good movie, but another Best Picture nominee. She does *The Heat*, which you brought up a minute ago, in 2013. And that's action hero territory for her, right? I mean, she's a cop with Melissa McCarthy. Huge hit again, though you do start to wonder at this stage — and I've sort of been talking about this. Can she only be a success opposite someone where the package is the selling point? But then, *Gravity* comes along and becomes the biggest hit that she's done, I guess — I think — and it's just her. I mean, that blows that out of the water, right? I mean, yeah, Clooney is in that for a minute. But *Gravity* is, to me, one of the two or three best movies of the last decade and she is phenomenal in it. It's one of my favorite movies, you know, contemporary movies. Best Picture, won like six Oscars. She was nominated. probably deserved to win. What else can be said about this movie anyway? It's almost 10 years. It is 10 years old, strangely. Are you a *Gravity* fan?

KATE ERBLAND

I am a *Gravity* fan. Should I tell my *Gravity* story?

KRIS TAPLEY

Yeah, absolutely. Now is the time.

KATE ERBLAND

I went to see — so I was at the Toronto International Film Festival, and I believe it was my first time there. And there was like the big premiere screening of it and I couldn't go to it. But I was going the next day, and that's the one I really wanted to go to because it was in the IMAX theater, and like, they have — it's real IMAX there. So, I was like, yeah, this sounds great. So, I haven't gotten to see it yet. Everyone else has seen it that day and I'm at a party and I'm hobnobbing, chit-chatting, and I'm standing with my beloved boyfriend, Mike Ryan, and he's talking with other people who have seen it that day. And they're like, "Yeah, it's so great." And Mike goes, "Yeah, it's so great. The scene where she lands on Earth? Like, I really felt that." And I turned to him, I said, "Are you kidding me?" And he's like, "What? It's not a spoiler." And I was like, "It's a huge spoiler. The only spoiler." And I'm someone who actually loves spoilers. But this, I was like, "What the hell?" But the point of that is, even when I did go see it the next day, even knowing that she makes it, it didn't detract from the experience and the tension and the fear that I had. But, yeah.

KRIS TAPLEY

I have a similar story about *Speed*. I've told it, I think, before, on here. Some kid on baseball practice was like, "Dude, I saw *Speed*. Dennis Hopper gets his head knocked off at the end!" But this is like — that just made me want to watch the movie more. Nobody cared about spoiler culture back then. But yeah, *Gravity* kicks ass. And my

story about *Gravity* is it was the first movie that I saw twice at the Telluride Film Festival, and anybody that's been at the Telluride Film Festival knows it's four days, it's a sprint, and you don't have time to see a movie a second time. Like, you want to fill that time with other movies. And my last day, I was like, "I'm going to go see *Gravity* again." Like, that movie is an experience like no other and I just, I'm a huge fan. And it showed that she could — I don't think she needed to show it — but it showed that she could just, like, handle being this person shouldering a movie by herself. Not many actors really even get that kind of an opportunity, but she knocked it out of the park. This is all, by the way, part of a stretch where she's just a box office queen, because she's also a voice in *Minions*, which is a massive hit. She's in *The Heat*. She's in *Gravity*. *Ocean's 8* in 2018 is a hit. Let's talk about *Ocean's 8*. I did just watch it on your recommendation because I had not seen it. It's fine. She is perfect for this kind of a movie in this kind of a cast, though, because it's like her, Cate Blanchett, Anne Hathaway, Helena Bonham Carter, Awkwafina. You know, it's a rowdy group of girls.

KATE ERBLAND

Ladies.

KRIS TAPLEY

Pardon me. But what do you got to say about *Ocean's 8*?

KATE ERBLAND

I mean, I think it's fun. It's not up to par with the other contemporary *Ocean's* movies. I think it's an interesting role for her because she's a little more, like, scuzzy than we're used to, which is fun. Like, she's kind of playing the bad guy. I do think the most fun part about it is watching her and Cate Blanchett together. I think that Sandy is really great at sharing the screen with other women and she does that to a T in *Ocean's 8*. Like, I mean, in *Miss Congeniality*, it's like her and Heather Burns and Candice Bergen and in *The Heat*, obviously, her and Melissa McCarthy, and so I think she likes working with other women and she's really good at it and I think it's fun. It's fine. It has some great set pieces. I would not be opposed to a sequel of this one.

KRIS TAPLEY

Yeah. That's true, too, about — you say she likes working with women and also just when you look at — I mean, I'm just thinking back. Like, my joke on *Practical Magic* is maybe she wanted to work with Dianne Wiest. Like, maybe that was the draw. And obviously Nicole Kidman, and I think about Ellen Burstyn in *Divine Secrets* and obviously Betty White, who she was close with, for *The Proposal* and just movies like this. She's always at home in these scenes. She just feels like the right ingredient. She also throws in, by the way, *Our Brand is Crisis*, David Gordon Green. It's a small, little movie that didn't really do much, but I guess it is message-oriented, kind of. But it's something that's thrown in there. But the same year as *Ocean's 8* she is in *Bird Box*. This is sort of the Netflix period. I will say this. *Bird Box* and *The Unforgivable* are still the number three and number nine most watched movies on Netflix ever.

KATE ERBLAND

What's number one?

KRIS TAPLEY

Number one is *Red Notice*, as it as it would be.

KATE ERBLAND

Is number two *Extraction*?

KRIS TAPLEY

Now you're going to make me look. Most watched Netflix movies. Number two is *Don't Look Up*.

KATE ERBLAND

Really?

KRIS TAPLEY

Well, yeah, I mean, look, Leo, Jennifer Lawrence, I mean, it's packed with people that people want to see. It makes sense. But right in the thick of all of this are these two Sandra Bullock movies where it's — that's what they are. They're Sandra Bullock movies. They're not other people movies. They're not ensemble movies. And, you know, hat plus *The Lost City*, which came out last year with Channing Tatum. The one she did with Channing Tatum, which was a hit. The point is, she's still got it. She's still something, someone that audiences want to see. Her audience is still there. They haven't gone anywhere. Why do you think she maintains this audience that presumably started with *Speed*? Because that was the movie that really set up her personality and this kind of just bright, likable persona, and maybe that's the simple answer, that people want to go see bright, likable personas and "what is she going to do next?" But, you know, she maintains, across a spectrum of movies, this audience. I mean, *Gravity*, *Lost City*, *Bird Box*, and *Unforgivable*, *Miss Congeniality*, these are wildly different movies. So, it's not like audiences will only go see her in a certain thing, is my point. They will show up for her. So, what do you think? Why does she still, in 2023, 30 years after she was on this bus, still maintain that audience?

KATE ERBLAND

Well, no, I mean, I think you partially nail it with, like, this bright, likable personality, and she's doing different things. But I think people always like Sandra and they feel like they know her and sort of going back to that America's Sweetheart thing, that she's been so a part of the fabric of so many different kinds of contemporary American movies. And I think people, you know, they hear her name, they see that she's on a poster, that brings with it a sense of, like, a certain kind of quality, and that it's not going to be something trashy and talking down to the audience. Like, you're going to have a good time. You're going to enjoy yourself, even if it is something like *Bird Box*, which is extremely grueling and not my favorite thing that she's done, but I think, yeah, there's just a mark of quality when she's involved in something. It's going to be something that people are going to enjoy that will have appeal for all kinds of, you know, potential audience members.

KRIS TAPLEY

And she's also not really mercenary. I mean, a number of these movies she produced as well. So, she's got a creative hand in things. She's not just showing up, phoning it in and leaving. I wasn't sure if I wanted to bring this up. I don't want to bog down into it, certainly. I do think there might be a vulnerability element here that I think people just — she's been through some shit publicly, right? I mean, similar to Keanu, by the way. Keanu loses his best friend in *River Phoenix*. Keanu went through, you know, the death of his girlfriend and the stillbirth of their baby and just a number of things he's been through publicly. And then with Sandra, she's had a number of stalkers. Big events in her life. The stuff that Jesse James put her through is brutal, especially all of that happening, like, literally in the immediate wake of winning the Oscar, all of that blows up within a month with his infidelities. So, I just think she's been through some things publicly that creates a vulnerability and maybe a rooting interest, too. I mean, that's not why she has an audience, but I do think it keeps her off of a pedestal in a way. Does that make sense or is that unfair?

KATE ERBLAND

Yeah, no, because it's like, I mean, as you said, some of the things that she's gone through are, you know, not exactly relatable, because, you know, she had a number of stalkers. That's not something the average person is going to understand. But it's just like, here's someone who is this huge, famous, beautiful, multi-talented millionaire, and she still has bad stuff happen to her. But she keeps carrying on. She doesn't, you know, run away from the spotlight. She doesn't, like, stop working. She has a resilience to her that, even with outsized circumstances, people, I think, recognize and really spark to.

KRIS TAPLEY

Yeah. She certainly doesn't seem to have taken on any cynicism along the way, which would be easy for anyone in her place, and people still want to see her, man. So, it's a great, incredible, ongoing career. I don't really know what else we can say here other than Sandra Bullock rocks and, you know, I said this on the last episode, some movie had to be the one to say it made her a star, because she was going to be a star no matter what. Something gets to say it's the one and *Speed* is the one. *Speed* is the movie that made Sandra Bullock a star. So, in closing, what would you have to say about her legacy and, you know, where she's at, where she's going? You never really know where she's going, by the way, right? Like, I was going to say that, suddenly a Sandra Bullock movie is coming along and it becomes a hit, you know? It's not like you see the horizon on her career all the time. It's very interesting.

KATE ERBLAND

No, I mean, I think it's just, don't underestimate her and don't think you know what she's going to do next. But whatever she does next is going to be of a certain quality and she's going to give herself to it totally. Yeah, as you said, she's never going to phone it in. So, you may not know what it looks like, but I think you know, a certain level of care and quality is going to go into it.

KRIS TAPLEY

Totally. Well, that's Sandra Bullock, folks. Thank you again, Kate, for coming on the show. That's Kate, Erbland, everybody.

KATE ERBLAND

Thank you so much for having me, Kris.

[OUTRO MUSIC]

KRIS TAPLEY

Next week on *50 MPH...*

KRIS TAPLEY

With production only weeks away, Fox decides the script for *Speed* needs a tune-up. Big mistake.

JORGE SARALEGUI

He made the script clearly worse. You know, just thinking about it infuriates me.

MARK GORDON

We gave him specific instructions and he just kind of went off and did what he did, and he was paid a fuck-load of money.

KRIS TAPLEY

Screenwriter Paul Attanasio takes a crack at an uncredited rewrite that ultimately freaks everyone out.

PAUL ATTANASIO

It really put the doctor in script doctor. I would come in and I would be, like, here's where it hurts.

KRIS TAPLEY

I'll also talk to screenwriter Joss Whedon, whose own work under the hood gave *Speed* the spark it needed.

JOSS WHEDON

People always assume the script doctor comes in to make jokes, and usually it's to connect things so that they make sense.

KRIS TAPLEY

I'll also unwind the mystery of who wrote the film's most iconic line. Everyone says it was Joss, but guess what?

JOSS WHEDON

Really? I mean, gosh, it would be hilarious if I did write it and all these years I've just forgotten. Yeah, I don't think I can take credit for it.

KRIS TAPLEY

All of that and more next week right here on *50 MPH!*

KRIS TAPLEY

Thanks so much for listening. *50 MPH* is written, produced and edited by yours truly, Kris Tapley. You can find us on Twitter @50MPHPod. I'm @kristapley. That's Kris with a K. You can also catch every episode and more at our website 50MPHpodcast.com. If you dug the show, please like and subscribe and do all the things. We'll see you next time.