

Cloverfield - DVD

Hot horror action or snooze fest?

by Neil Queen published on 6 June 2008

Breaking down Cloverfield into its nuts and bolts - Blair Witch does Godzilla - it should have been little more than a fun, but derivative affair. The mockumentary is a style borne of the indie fringes - see also Man Bites Dog - so the deft subtlety it requires could easily have been the first thing to go in a blockbuster outing. So you really have to admire director Matt Reeves for keeping that intact and in not only keeping pace with those genre classics, but perhaps even outstripping them in terms of impact.

As friends gather in Manhattan for a farewell party for Rob (Stahl-David), pal TJ records it on a handheld camera for posterity. Instead, the revellers find themselves caught in the middle of a massive September 11 style attack, vaguely revealed to be from a creature the Japanese Toho studio would be proud of, and the camera becomes a verite record of the unfolding catastrophe and their fight for survival.

Presented as found footage, every effort is made to distance it from traditional Hollywood fare. After doing enough to set up the characters so that we at least give half a rat's arse, the comfort blanket of storytelling and composition is then torched, meaning that, like Blair Witch before it, the events onscreen are responded to via gut instincts, rather than via the brain.

This is rammed home by the fact that the characters themselves are in a fight or flight situation, and that no real back story to the attack is offered nor are any narrative clues that suggest a possible resolution. The jump cuts, bad angles and framing only confirm the intent to deliver an instinctive, free-flowing piece that doesn't want to spoonfeed you.

Though the stark reminders of the attack on the Twin Towers have rightly been criticised by many as tasteless - you wonder how New Yorkers feel



...cont.

about their trauma being reused as entertainment - it makes for a powerful end result. While BlairÖ jerked around with our desensitized primal fears, Cloverfield, with it's amateur Sky-News-live-in -Gaza shaky cam, brutally plugs into harsh realities that we are coming to terms with post -9/11.

Blurring the real and the unreal, applying fantastical details to an everyday template, makes for an incredible spectacle, most notably in a scene that features the culture clash of a CGI creature being recorded by high-street camera.

It's far from flawless. As mentioned, it was criticised for referencing 9/11, mainly for doing so only on an artificial level, while the refusal to accept that anybody exists outside of the 18 to 25 age group cripples any lasting realism and brings a whiff of Hollyoaks to proceedings.

As for the DVD extras, the pop-up featurettes, accessible when a symbol flashes up, are a neat idea, but these are mainly fluffy PR interludes, which break up the film's relentless intensity.

VERDICT

That said, nothing should divert us from that fact that for a mainstream teen flick, it's a brave triumph.

At a glance

What is it?

Action-sci-fi-horror

Good

Bold and fresh movie making

Bad

The very real threat of motion sickness

Verdict

A synapse-frying, major organ-wrenching take on the monster movie

Price £19.99

Our score

8/10

Your score

?/10