In his fourth review of the five Best Picture of 2006 contenders, Mitch reviews "Babel", starring Brad Pitt and Cate Blanchett as a married couple seeking respit in Morocco, only to run into an unexpected dose of violence. Up for a host of Oscars, this is a love/hate film. Did Mitch love it or hate it? Find out for yourself in his latest movie review for us. On Thursday, we'll rerun Mitch's review of the final best pic contender, "The Departed".

Despite its many flaws, I very much enjoyed the movie “Crash”, and felt it did deserve the Oscar for “Best Picture” more than the favored “Brokeback Mountain”. However; the down side of the success of movies with multiple, overlapping story lines like “Crash”, “Syrianna”, and “Traffic” is that eventually there will be inferior counterfeits shoved down our throats in the name of “Art”.

“Babel” is such a movie. Loaded with good intentions, great actors, an intriguing concept, and a “hot” director, it has been released upon us with the intention of competing for the major awards next spring.

But “Babel”, like the original tower itself, is an indecipherable mess.

Director Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu (“21 Grams”), along with his cinematographer and editor have mangled the four separate stories with quick cuts, jerky camera work, and ill-timed jumps from one story to the next. The jumps come either too quickly, before you have a chance to grasp what is happening in a scene, or too late, lingering too long on pained reaction shots or stifled dialog.

Brad Pitt and Cate Blanchett are listed as the main “stars”, but their part of the story is the most boring, and they are given very little opportunity to showcase their considerable skills. They play a married couple out on a very unpleasant “vacation” to Morocco to recharge their batteries after their infant child died of SIDS. The only other bit of information we’re given is that she doesn’t like Morocco, which might indicate a lot more problems in the marriage, as most of the time when a couple shells out that much money for a trip overseas, you’d think they could find a location that would be satisfactory to both.

On a tour bus driving from one dirty, desolate location to another, the sleeping Blanchett is suddenly shot in the shoulder. Panicked, the bus goes to the nearest isolated village, which is conveniently the home of the English speaking tour guide. From that point, the only “acting” we get from the two stars is seeing Pitt thrash about hysterically as he tries to get aid for his wife; and Blanchett moan in pain.

The shot came from two goat herding boys, brothers who were testing out a new rifle their father got them to ward off jackals. The second story concerns the boys and their family, but once again you don’t really get to know much about them, other than a poor taste scene where the younger brother spies on his older sister getting undressed, and then fantasizes about it. After the shooting, the authorities are first convinced it was Muslim terrorists that attacked the bus, but a knowledgeable police inspector has other ideas, and he soon comes looking for the family to question them.

In the third story, a Mexican woman working as a nanny for two young children in San Diego decides to take them with her and her irresponsible nephew to Tijuana for her son’s wedding. This is obviously the segment closest to the heart of Inarritu, which means we are subjected to excessive scenes of Mexican wedding traditions, music, and culture in a similar manner as dinner guests trapped watching the hosts’ home movies of their cousins’ nuptials. Problems occur on the way back into the U.S. as the woman allows the nephew to drive her and the children back while he is obviously heavily intoxicated. For this, and other stupid decisions she makes, it is impossible to feel any sort of empathy towards her. Later, when she has to face the consequences of her actions, I was sitting in the theater saying to myself; “Good”…not the reaction the director was going for.

The fourth story is the only one that really worked for me, following a young Japanese girl named Chieko who is a deaf mute. Chieko is still depressed regarding the death of her mother, and she is having a very rough time dealing with her feelings. Those emotions very much include isolation, anger, and sexual frustration. She is only comfortable around her school mates from her special school for the deaf, but this also causes problems later on as her best friend ends up hooking up with a boy Chieko found attractive.

Rinko Kikuchi is the best actor in the film as the sad teenager. She cannot convey any of her feelings through words, but you still can see every emotion and thought coming through from her actions as she tries to exist in a world that literally cannot understand her.

Failure to communicate is the central theme of the movie, and in that regard Inarritu did succeed. Misunderstandings, heartache, and tragedy can occur when people are unable to talk to each other; either due to a language barrier or an inability to listen. Had Inarritu concentrated more on that central theme rather than wasting screen time on twirling, loud reaction shots, this could have been an exceptional movie. Unfortunately, he failed in that regard by not giving the audience enough time to develop any rapport with the characters, a “must” when you are focusing on flawed people. Matt Dillon’s racist cop in “Crash” is a great example of how to do this correctly as you were able to see the man as someone who was more complex and sympathetic despite his bigotry.

Instead, what we have is a movie that is too pretentious and self-important for its own good. “Babel” seems to be too busy gunning for Major Awards to be bothered with such minutia as trying to connect with an audience, and its failure in the latter should lead to a failure in the former as well.

My Rating: Tim Couch (1 ½ footballs). The story of Chieko is the only thing that stopped it from receiving a Mike Phipps.

Review Key:

Otto Graham: Over 4 Footballs. HOF quality movie

Bernie Kosar: 4 Footballs. Excellent

Brian Sipe: 3 ½ Footballs. Very Good

Frank Ryan: 3 Footballs. Good, solid film.

Bill Nelsen: 2 ½ Footballs. OK. Worth seeing at the theater.

Kelly Holcomb: 2 Footballs. Disappointingly inconsistent but some bright spots. Rent it on DVD.

Tim Couch: 1 ½ Footballs. Poor. Had potential, but lack of support led to an overall stinker.

Jeff Garcia: 1 Football. Horrible. All hype; no performance.

Mike Phipps: ½ Football. “We gave away Paul Warfield for THIS?” level of suck

Spergon Wynn: No Footballs. UberSuckitude personified.