

Cloverfield (2007)

Rated PG-13. Our ratings: V-8 ; L- 5; S/N-1 . Running time: 1 hour 25 min.

*But I, O Lord, cry out to you;
in the morning my prayer comes before you.
O Lord, why do you cast me off?
Why do you hide your face from me?
Wretched and close to death from my youth up,
I suffer your terrors; I am desperate.
Psalm 88:13-15*

The world of the Psalmist is secularized world of the young New Yorkers throwing a surprise going away party for their friend. Rob (Michale Stahl-David) is being transferred by his company to Japan, so a group gathers to wish him "Bon voyage." One of them starts videotaping the proceedings, but when called away his task is taken up by best friend Hud (T. J. Miller) It is only through the viewfinder of the camcorder that we see the subsequent gruesome events. We are told at the beginning of the film that this is a tape found in the ruins of an underpass in what once was known as Central Park.

Before disaster hits we learn that Rob and Beth (Odette Yustman) have been lovers, but then she walks out of the party

after arguing with Rob. Soon disaster hits the city, a series of fireballs and explosions lighting up the night sky. As the crowd rushes outside to see what is occurring, we see a skyscraper falling, and then the onrush of a cloud of dust and debris, made all too familiar by 9/11. What follows is a series of horrible events as panicked crowds rush about, the military battles what seems to be a monster as big as a skyscraper, and in the tunnels of the subways our band of yuppies encounter some murderous spider-like creatures, the bite of which does terrible things to the victim's body.

On his cell phone Rob has talked with Beth. Learning that she is injured in the wreckage of her high-rise apartment several miles away uptown, he is intent on reaching her despite the dangers of the streets and subway tunnel. His four friends decide to accompany him rather than submit to the military's insistence that they be evacuated. Bad for them, but good for us, in that, due to the constraints imposed by the filmmakers, we would not be able to see what transpires. Or, maybe not so good, this being the kind of film one sees once and then moves on. (Mention should be made, however, of the good special effects, especially in the scene when the severed head of the Statue of Liberty crashes down upon a crowded street.)

The restricted view afforded us in *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* makes sense, but here the jerky, often out of focus shots that take the place of the all-seeing eye of the conventionally photographed film seems frustrating, a gimmick that takes our minds off the shallowness of the characters and the often dumb decisions they make (they should have watched more horror movies). The conceit that a guy would keep his eye glued to a camcorder even when running for his life or fighting off deadly monsters is a bit much to swallow. And as far as I can remember, none of those facing a horrible death have the comfort or hope afforded the Psalmist when he cries out in the midst of his terror. A better horror film with a similar ending is the adaptation of a Stephen King story, *The*

Mist.