

BATTLE IN HEAVEN (2005)

Category : DVD REVIEWS (A-D)

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Directed by Carlos Reygadas

Review by David Carter

Released by Tartan Video

Running Time: 95 minutes

Rating: NR

Color format: Color

Audio/Subtitles: 5.1 Dolby Digital Surround Sound Spanish, 5.1 DTS Spanish, 2.0 Spanish/English Subtitles

Region Code: 1, NTSC

Aspect Ratio: Anamorphic Widescreen

16:9 Enhanced: No

Special Features: Interview with Director and star Anapola Mushkadiz, selected scenes from JAPON

Trailer Online: [Yes](#)



Celebrated young Mexican director Carlos Reygadas followed up his acclaimed first film JAPON with a vastly different and more controversial film, BATTLE IN HEAVEN. Though nominated for the Palm D'Or at Cannes, BATTLE IN HEAVEN was attacked by many critics as indulgent and gratuitous for its experimental narrative structure and frequently graphic depiction of sexuality. Since the film's release the controversy has seemed to somewhat overshadow the film itself. Though it is easy to be distracted the film's superficial aspects, Reygadas has crafted a complex and sometimes hauntingly beautiful work.

Marcos lives an unfulfilling life as a driver for a high ranking Mexican general. He and his wife have kidnapped the child of one of their neighbors in hopes of securing a ransom, but unfortunately the child has died. After a long absence, the general's daughter Ana has returned, and Marcos is responsible for chauffeuring her around town. Ana too has a secret: she works as a prostitute in a high end brothel. Since she has trusted Marcos with her secret, he shares with Ana the fate of the child. Initially taken aback by the revelation, Ana eventually warms to Marcos and even begins to love him due to the bond of secrecy they now share. She urges Marcos to turn himself in; a move

which his wife at first protests against but soon relents to let him do it after the upcoming religious pilgrimage. Before the pilgrimage, though, Marcos has a bizarre religious epiphany that causes him to take some bold actions that will seal the fates of all involved.



The most immediately striking thing about BATTLE IN HEAVEN is the unique way in which Reygadas uses the camera. The camera is, in essence, another character. It moves on its own, often independent of the action in the scene, lingering on seemingly unimportant details. Reygadas doesn't use a Steadicam, so the camera jostles and shakes as it moves, giving the feeling of a POV shot from a character's perspective. While it may take some viewers a while to get use to it, the technique allowed Reygadas to get some hypnotically beautiful scenes.

Hypnotic is a good description of the film. The dialogue is sparse and often scenes are eerily silent. Reygadas explores the sexual relationships between Marcos and the female characters very matter-of-factly, and there is both male and female full frontal nudity at several points in the film. This frankness, when coupled with the ambiguity about Marcos' situation, is the source of much of the controversy surrounding the film. However, it's also the film's main strength. Reygadas has his characters naked, both literally and figuratively, for the viewer's examination.



Tartan Video is most well known for its outstanding work bringing Asian films to an American audience, but they also have done considerable work with the films of other countries as well. Their DVD of BATTLE IN HEAVEN is excellent. The presentation in anamorphic widescreen highlights Reygadas' impressive visuals. They've also included a very interesting interview with the director in which he give insight into his motivations behind the film.

The complexities of BATTLE IN HEAVEN will unfortunately make it inaccessible to some viewers. Those with an adventurous spirit or a love for artistry in cinema are encouraged to track this film down. Reygadas' style is reminiscent of some of the greatest European filmmakers of the sixties and seventies. He is one of the most promising new directors of the past few years, and BATTLE IN HEAVEN is a good indicator that his future works will be powerful.