

Film Review: The Diving Bell and The Butterfly

Written by Dave Howard



Director [Julian Schnabel](#) 's ("Basquiat") new film "The Diving Bell and the Butterfly (Le Scaphandre et le Papillon)" is top notch triumph in the exploration of an extremely claustrophobic subject. Winner of the Best Director Prize this year at the Cannes Film Festival this is a visually engrossing film, but watch out-- it's not all eye candy; this is a film that will stick with you for a while..

Former Elle Editor, Jean-Dominique Bauby, a self-absorbed, half-assed family man and adulterer, contracts a very rare disease in which he becomes entombed in his own body. While his mind remains fertile, he is forced to communicate only through blinking his left eye. His family friends stand by wanting to help, but not entirely sure how. After an expected bout of depression he painstakingly composes the novel of the same name letter by letter.

Typically medical dramas give me the heebies. The main reason is because of the relentless button pushing and the mallet de tearjerk that looms overhead. These are staples in films such as "Terms of Endearment" or to a lesser degree "Whose Life is It Anyway?" Such heavy handedness drowns out the drama. "The Diving Bell and the Butterfly" is a story of inspiration. Unlike the two formerly mentioned films the viewer actually becomes an inhabitant in the patient's body. His frustrations become our frustrations. His drama becomes our drama. And his drama is one of details the normal person would take for granted. In one instance, an orderly simply turns off a soccer game and it is devastating.

The first half of the film is shot mostly in the POV of Baubey and it is an extremely powerful tactic. The viewer becomes acutely aware of their own movement. Every leg recross, every cheek to cheek shift in your chair, every arbitrary movement you make while watching becomes amplified. This is not an easy device to get away with. Janusz Kaminski ("Munich", "Schindler's List") uses his trademark haunting visuals to suck you into Bauby's world. During the POV sequences you are consistently aware that there is something just out of the frame that you just can turn your head to see. Just as this device becomes almost too frustrating as an audience member, Schnabel wisely pulls back in order to see the full portrait of this man's life.

A deep and moving film, "The Diving Bell and the Butterfly (Le Scaphandre et le Papillon)" is well worth viewing and after a little time to heal, a second. Not only does it inspire but

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ultimately will make you feel grateful for everything you have. Even if all you have is a single blinking eye.