

Low-Budget 'November' Is Muddled, Pretentious Film: Rick Warner

(Review. Rick Warner is the movie critic for Bloomberg News. The opinions expressed are his own.)

By Rick Warner

July 22 (Bloomberg) -- In ``November,''' a Los Angeles detective investigating a multiple murder decides that some fuzzy crime-scene photos won't help solve the case because ``they're too arty for their own good.''

That's also the main problem with the movie, which is a laborious and pretentious rip-off of ``Blow-Up,''' ``Memento'' and ``The Sixth Sense.''

Directed by Greg Harrison, whose feature debut ``Groove'' was about the all-night, dance-and-drug rave scene in San Francisco, ``November'' desperately tries to be deep, mysterious and artful. Instead, it's contrived and confusing.

The movie's central figure, photographer Sophie Jacobs (Courteney Cox), is wracked by guilt after her boyfriend is killed during a convenience-store holdup as she waits outside in a car on Nov. 7 (thus the title). She feels that way partly because she's the one who asked him to stop for a chocolate treat and partly because she had a brief affair shortly before his murder.

One day, while using a projector to review photos taken by her students at a local college, Sophie comes across a strange slide that appears to show her car outside the convenience store on the night of the shooting. Cue the spooky music. Is the picture real or a hallucination? Is she losing her mind or about to find her boyfriend's killer?

Librarian Look

No one knows, least of all Sophie, who starts seeing a shrink (Nora Dunn) to figure it out. But things just get more and more curious. She hears banging on her apartment ceiling, watches a light bulb crack for no apparent reason, gets weird phone calls and sees security-camera footage of the holdup show up on a TV screen.

Harrison, borrowing from ``The Sixth Sense,''' deliberately blurs the line between reality and imagination to underscore Sophie's emotional trauma. He also scrambles time sequences a la ``Memento'' and hints at undiscovered clues hidden in photographs, a plot device brilliantly exploited by Michelangelo Antonioni in ``Blow-Up.''' But the

cinematic pastiche never comes together in a coherent manner, leaving the viewer as much bewildered as bewitched.

Cox, once named the ``hottest babe'' by Playboy magazine, looks like a mousy librarian in ``November'' with dark glasses and a lifeless coiffure that Sophie's mother (Anne Archer) describes as an ``underachiever's haircut.'' Her plain appearance is in stark contrast to Harrison's gimmicky direction, which features jumpy editing, slow motion, flashbacks and eerie ``Twilight Zone'' sounds.

``November'' was shot in 15 days with consumer-model, digital-video cameras for \$150,000 -- lunch money for Cox when she was making \$1 million per episode on ``Friends.'' Just goes to show that low-budget quickies can be just as bad as bloated Hollywood spectacles.

``November,'' from Sony Pictures Classics, opens today in New York and Los Angeles.

--Editors: West, Kraus

Story illustration: For more on ``November,'' see <http://www.sonyclassics.com/november>. For more cultural news from Bloomberg, see {MUSE <GO>}.

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