

'The Curse Of La Llorona' delivers the same old jump scares

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Rating: «« out of «««««

Running Time: 93 minutes

There are certainly plenty of franchises vying for your entertainment dollar these days, including numerous comic book properties and, to a lesser extent, the various horror movies based around 2013's *The Conjuring* (which feature recurring characters such as the possessed doll Annabelle and a malicious demon nun). The latest in this horror category is

The Curse of La Llorona

, which attempts to adapt and incorporate another figure of legend into its universe. First, the good news... this reviewer can report that it is an improvement over the previous entry, *The Nun*

. However, the bad news is that the movie is still flawed, and isn't nearly as scary as it should have been.

Primarily set in 1973, the story follows single mom Anna Tate-Garcia (Linda Cardellini) working with the Los Angeles police on child welfare cases. While investigating a case involving two young boys possibly being abused by their mother Patricia Alvarez (Patricia Velasquez), she and other members of her family come into contact with the title figure. Anna learns that La Llorona was once happily married, but drowned her children in a jealous rage after learning that her husband was having an affair and is doomed to continue snatching and drowning children. Anna and her kids Chris (Roman Christou) and Samantha (Jaynee-Lynne Kinchen) become targets and turn to ex-priest/shaman Rafael Olvera (Raymond Cruz) to help them ward off the

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sinister presence.

The movie looks good and early scenes are impressively lit and moody. There are some eerie moments near the beginning with La Llorona appearing in reflected surfaces and cracking glass, or appearing in dimly lit hallways and following potential targets. The production design is also strong, presenting an authentic 70s appearance to the environment. Another intriguing element is introduced after Anna's children are attacked and left burned and bruised. The lead ends up under police investigation, as well as suspicion of her own co-workers.

Alas, this great potential isn't fully developed and the screenplay chooses to ignore the personal drama and character bits, instead, delivering a series of increasingly goofy attack sequences. One or two moments work reasonably well (including a bathtub scene in which the villain slowly moves her hands through the hair of a child), but far more miss the mark. The movie quickly becomes a repeated series of scares in which La Llorona appears in the dark, screeches and grasps at various characters. In fact, the second half of the film deals almost entirely with the mother and children retreating into their home and trying to fend off the monster with the help of the eccentric Olvera.

The movie's biggest flaw is showing too much of its title character. The opening scenes are effective because viewers can't get a clear view of the threat. Unfortunately, as the film progresses we see more and more of the spirit; it jumps out so frequently that the CGI monster becomes less and less threatening as the story progresses. It doesn't help matters that the leads make terrible choices, always investigating the source of unsettling noises occurring around them. And as the confrontations escalate, events make less and less sense. The final scene, featuring a character carrying on a casual conversation while suffering from a severe wound, adds to the absurdity.

Finally, fans of the franchise may also be disappointed to learn that there is little more than a small reference to other characters in the series (although to be honest, it's hard to imagine anywhere down the line that La Llorona, Annabelle and the Nun are going to team up and attempt some kind of a climactic scare assault on all of humanity). Whatever the producers may ultimately have in mind for the franchise, *The Curse of La Llorona* doesn't inspire many chills. This is a slickly produced horror picture, but one that abandons its most interesting story elements and presents the same old jump scares horror fans will have already seen a hundred times over.

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