

Rating: «« out of «««««

Running Time: 106 minutes

It has only been two months since the release of *The Curse of La Llorona*, the last film in *The Conjuring*
universe. This time out, the makers turn to one of the series’ most iconic threats with *Annabelle Comes Home*
. Yet while promising to deliver some familiar faces doing battle with the forces of evil, the movie actually focuses on elements that won’t be of nearly as much interest. Ever wanted to see a movie that focuses primarily on the babysitter of two renowned paranormal investigators? Didn’t think so.

The film is set in the early ‘70s and follows Lorraine Warren (Vera Farmiga) and her husband Ed (Patrick Wilson) who collect Annabelle and lock her up in a special room in their home. For those unaware, the title character is a doll filled with a violent and inhuman spirit. Some time after putting Annabelle in the room, the couple heads out for the weekend, leaving their 10-year-old daughter Judy (Mckenna Grace) alone with teenage babysitter Mary Ellen (Madison Iseman). When the guardian’s pal Daniela (Katie Sarife) decides to break into the quarantined room to try to communicate with her deceased father, she inadvertently frees Annabelle and some other ghosts.

The girls, along with friendly teen neighbor Bob (Michael Cimino) are forced to endure the onslaught of supernatural events that follow.

The good news is that the movie is well shot and features a few nice images amidst the general nonsense. Reflections of Annabelle in glass are used to good effect and when the more explicit attacks begin there are a couple of nice angles featured. One involves the camera tilting sideways as a character searches for the doll in the house, and the most impressive, captured from overhead, follows a youngster fleeing in terror through the hallways of the domicile.

Additionally, the presence early on of Farmiga and Wilson does add some legitimacy to the proceedings. Unfortunately, they’re only present in the intro and final scene of the film, leaving the bulk of material focused on the kids. While the youngsters are likable, they are forced into doing dopey things for no reason other than to further the plot. Despite the obvious presence of evil, the kids almost never seem interested in turning on any lights, or getting them to work after they fail. Their behavior and actions become increasingly silly.

This doesn’t look like the biggest home in the universe, and many appearances of evil dolls and sinister spirits result in screams and wails from the separated leads, yet amazingly, they never seem to hear each other in duress.

Truthfully, the ghosts don’t do much for the first half except appear and disappear, rattle cabinets, and leave written queries for the children that don’t actually make much sense. Of course, Annabelle’s evil plan is to find a soul to possess (and let’s face it, anyone who has seen any of these movies knows that this is always the doll’s intention). Yet the eventual reveal only leaves one wondering why, if the malevolent spirit wanted a human body so badly, why would they announce it to potential victims? Or why not take the many opportunities presented to them much earlier, to take control of a human body, instead of just scaring them a dozen times first?

Instead of clarifications, things get increasingly absurd, as the kids try to fight off assaults throughout the night after aimlessly wandering around and investigating threatening noises.

For any future screenwriters out there, it’s also probably not the wisest of ideas to have your characters say things like, “This is stupid,” more than once, for it eventually begins to put the same negative thoughts into the minds of viewers. It isn’t much better for the series to pit a

10-year-old and a trio of teens against what is stated as one of the most dangerous and horrifying forces of evil in the franchise’s universe. For if the children win, then it minimizes any sense of fear or danger that viewers will be contending with in the future.

In summary, the production values are fine, but there isn’t much else here that viewers won’t have seen delivered more effectively in other franchise installments. Yes, the movie is slightly more effective than the previous La Llorona film or *The Nun*, but *Annabelle Comes Home* is still something of a rehash that gets sillier and sillier as it progresses. In the end, the Warren’s wallpaper choices may actually be scarier than any ghost or demonic spirit featured in this particular tale.

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By Glenn Kay
For the Sun