

‘10 Cloverfield Lane’ suspenseful, but slight

Written by Gallupsun Staff
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Rating: «« out of 4 stars

Running Time: 105 min.

Anyone remember the movie *Cloverfield*? Believe it or not, it has been eight years since that found footage science-fiction flick depicted aliens invading Manhattan. Out of the blue and completely without warning, a sequel has appeared. The follow-up is called

10 Cloverfield Lane

and is set in the same world as the original, even though it focuses on a completely different group of characters.

Specifically, this story follows Michelle (Mary Elizabeth Winstead), a young woman on the road. After a horrific car accident, she awakens to find herself inside a bomb shelter and chained to the wall. Howard (John Goodman) introduces himself as the person who “saved her” from the crash and explains that a chemical or nuclear attack (maybe even involving extraterrestrials) has killed all life on Earth. Also living in the shelter is Emmett (John Gallagher Jr.), a local who claims that Howard is telling the truth... well, at least that something terrible has occurred above. Of course, Michelle is suspicious of Howard’s bizarre claims and immediately works to try and free herself.

Early portions of the film are quite tense. The initial crash is excitingly captured and edited. In fact, this opening is flat out startling as the camera spins around with Michelle inside the vehicle, cutting jarringly away and back as the event unfolds. And the photography inside the small bunker is equally impressive, with old-fashioned family living room decor contrasting with the strange and eerie stories about the horrors above.

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As the characters are introduced, a great deal of trepidation is generated. Goodman is clearly having a good time as the conservative farmer. There are some unexpected mood swings as he veers wildly from a calm and fatherly presence to bursts of frustration and rage. In fact, some of the movie's most chilling moments are the quieter ones. There's a great bit when the group attempts to play a game together. Howard gives clues in an off-kilter and overly intense manner - the scene manages to play in both humorous and chilling manner.

Yet, while the cast are excellent and the film looks great, there are a few problems. As the story develops and more information is revealed, the level of suspense begins to dip. Early on, it's quite easy to get caught up in Michelle's plight and be unsure of her captor's honesty. Unfortunately, we also know that this is a sequel of sorts so viewers will ultimately be able to guess where it's going. For a movie that begins in such a small, claustrophobic environment, it changes its tone and approach significantly in the last twenty minutes, becoming much sillier in the process. Truthfully, I would have preferred that the movie stay locked down in the bowels of the shelter.

And as well made as it all is, this is also one of those movies that feels like a mere chapter in a lengthy film series (or a television series, for that matter). Apparently, you can't just tell a standalone story anymore. The movie doesn't offer a great deal of closure. Yes, it promises a bigger story. Yet with all of the tangents that have already been presented in the two films, the cynic in me speculates that the next chapter may just be another tale set within the same universe that doesn't move the central concept forward.

And other than Michelle's simple character arc in which she eventually resolves to face her problems head on, there isn't a whole lot more going on. It's difficult to see a deeper theme being presented. So in some respects, one wonders what the ultimate goal of this franchise is. It seems that wherever it may be going, there is no way that it will deliver a satisfying resolution.

To be fair, on a basic level *10 Cloverfield Lane* is a well-performed and effective little scare flick. It just seemed a bit slight and left me indifferent about its ultimate purpose - in the end, it's hard to get all that excited about another film series that may or may not resolve itself many years and several movies down the line.

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