

# Netflix's 'Chupa' sees Jonas Cuarón direct a Spielberg-inspired kids' adventure



CHENNAI: Mexican director Jonas Cuarón's latest Netflix outing, "Chupa," is a family adventure with a sentimental message at its core.

Alex (Evan Whitten) is struggling with his Mexican American identity and is no sooner introduced to viewers before he is packed off to Mexico to spend the summer with his absent-minded grandad, Chava (Demian Bichir), and cousins Memo (Nicklos Verdugo) and Luna (Ashley Ciarra).

Their strange adventure begins when the youngsters find a queer-looking creature, Chupacabra, a fearsome blood-sucking beast (or so says the legend). But what the kids come across is a cub that is so lovely and delightful it will pull on your heartstrings.

There are nefarious men, of course, who want to prove to the world that Chupacabra exists while the leader of the team, Richard Quinn (Christian Slater), has other ambitions as well. He would like to capture the creature and make his millions, because its body parts too are said to have medicinal value.

The family film, set in a remote Mexican town, clearly pays homage to Steven Spielberg, whose “ET” serves as heavy inspiration — there are even visual Easter eggs hidden throughout the film, a poster of Spielberg’s “Jurassic Park” in teenage Alex’s bedroom, for example.

As Alex fights to protect his family – including the sweet Chupa – he learns who he really is along the way in a sentimental addition to the light action.

Jonas Cuarón, who co-wrote “Gravity” (starring George Clooney and Sandra Bullock) with dad Alfonso, pushes “Chupa” into the realms of the quintessential children-led adventure movie akin to the Amblin productions of the 1980s. Alex and his cousins — with the old man chipping in — are determined to stop Quinn from taking baby Chupacabra, which finds its way into their shed.

“Chupa” likely targets an audience that has not seen “ET” or “Jurassic Park,” so Cuarón’s work may appeal to them.

The film was produced by vets Chris Columbus and Michael Barnathan — their experience with the Harry Potter franchise has given them experience in handling computer-generated critters. However, the young actors are a bit stiff and the director could have done a better job at bringing out their acting talent.

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