

‘Doctor Strange’ is Odd Enough to be Enchanting

Submitted by [JonHC](#) [1] on November 4, 2016 - 6:34pm

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Rating: **4.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – We’ve reached a point where comic book films are no longer a scarcity, but an eventuality. With several coming out every year, each one competes for our attention even though the originality behind their approach has the opposite effect. A great cinematic fatigue is almost upon us, but “Doctor Strange” shows a promising deviation that could possibly alter the franchise’s fate.



Mordo (Chiwetel Ejiofor) and Strange (Benedict Cumberbatch) in Marvel's ‘Doctor Strange’

Photo credit: Marvel Studios

Director and co-writer Scott Derrickson assembles a team of writers (Jon Spaihts and C. Robert Cargill) that best compliment his horror background and that would be needed to create this previously unexplored comic book world. Derrickson successfully blends the needed gravity (both the force of nature and the serious tone) the material calls for with a unifying sense of levity that interconnects every Marvel film. The film still agonizingly suffers from the predictable hero origin story that we have seen done so many times before, but it offers enough narrative and visual compensation to mostly make up for it. Derrickson’s directorial vision is clear, even as we’re taken on a disorienting ride through different dimensions. He channels the visual style of Christopher Nolan in “Inception” but takes his film to a kaleidoscopic extreme that even Nolan didn’t come close to trying to achieve.

The psychedelic, mesmerizing ride that is “Doctor Strange” is boosted by every element from narrative to direction, but it wouldn’t be half as memorable without the world-shifting cinematography of Ben Davis. Davis brought to life the visual splendor that is “Guardians of the Galaxy” and shows that he has the unique vision and meticulous understanding of what each comic book universe needs to succeed. Davis crafted a perfect real-life interpretation of the style inside every cell of the comic books. It is vibrant, ethereal and completely dizzying in the most intoxicating way. The 3D actually serves a depth-delivering purpose as we are thrown into the cinematic equivalent of an M.C. Escher painting and forced to navigate in a place where time, space and even the laws of physics are manipulated for our enjoyment.



Christine Palmer (Rachel McAdams) and Stephen Strange (Benedict Cumberbatch) share a moment in Marvel’s ‘Doctor Strange’

Photo credit: Marvel Studios

The film has enough character to make up for the handful of story-related problems, and that is not even taking into account the actors that lent their colossal talent to the film. Benedict Cumberbatch, a fan favorite all his own, shines in a role that requires equal parts confidence and comedy. Much like many of his past roles, such as Sherlock Holmes and Smaug the dragon, he lends his effortless bravado and backhanded charm to a film where even the inanimate objects, like his cape, have more on-screen charisma than other, competing comic book franchise films. Consummate villain, Mads Mikkelsen, proves to be a perfect counterpart for Cumberbatch and shows how he can match him in technique and light-heartedness (when needed).

Chiwetel Ejiofor and Tilda Swinton both prove great support despite the initial outrage surrounding the film. Swinton lends her androgyny and experience playing pale, celestial beings, like the Archangel Gabriel and the White Witch, to her enlightening role as the Ancient One. Meanwhile, Ejiofor is one of the few characters that anchors this film and keeps it from floating off into other worlds by providing much-needed grounding for the film with his stern pragmatism. The most unfortunate character development in the film is the treatment of Christine Palmer (Rachel McAdams). She is woefully underdeveloped and is relegated to being used by Strange only when he needs something. McAdams does a great job in the role, but her performance is undermined as the film capitalizes on her pain and grief only as a way to develop the character of Stephen Strange.



The Ancient One (Tilda Swinton) and Stephen Strange (Benedict Cumberbatch) get metaphysical in Marvel's 'Doctor Strange'

Photo credit: Marvel Studios

"Doctor Strange" does offer a great, progressive change up from the comic books by updating the character of Wong, played by Benedict Wong. Wong has been a long-time servant of Strange's in the comic book, but the writers of the film gave us what no other Marvel movie has yet to deliver: a strong Asian superhero. Wong has been transformed from an outdated servant to a powerful hero that is the head of his own house. Is it enough to counteract the casting of Swinton in a role usually held by a male of Chinese descent? I definitely am not the right person to judge that, but I can say that the way the writers played with the roles, changing the sex of a powerful figure and updating the importance and position of power of another character, is definitely more progressive than it is regressive. In essence, that is one of the reasons "Doctor Strange" works so well. It calls on cinematic styles and even music scoring from the past to create this interactive fun-house of a film that may suffer from a typical origin story approach but shows limitless potential for the future.

"Doctor Strange" opens everywhere on November 4th. Featuring Benedict Cumberbatch, Rachel McAdams, Mads Mikkelsen, Chiwetel Ejiofor, Benedict Wong, and Tilda Swinton. Screenplay by Jon Spaihts, Scott Derrickson, and C. Robert Cargill. Directed by Scott Derrickson. Rated "PG-13"



[17]

By [JON ESPINO](#) [18]

Film & Video Game Critic

HollywoodChicago.com

jon@hollywoodchicago.com [17]

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[17] <mailto:jon@hollywoodchicago.com>

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