

‘A Cure for Wellness’ is a crazed fever dream

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Rating: ««« out of 4 stars

Running Time: 146 min.

Holy cow. Simply put, the new film *A Cure For Wellness* is completely bonkers. It's a horror/thriller that ends up playing out like some sort of fever dream. In fact, for a good portion of the film one might think that the storyteller was just making things up as they were going along. Obviously, that couldn't have been the case. For one, the production design is incredible and the movie is gorgeously shot. Yet it abandons conventional plotting and goes over the same story beats multiple times, often veering into wild exaggeration. One can't help but think that the movie itself is as mad as some of its characters.

This production is certainly going to meet with extreme reactions. It's difficult to imagine anyone walking away from such an odd experience without forming some sort of strong opinion. While director Gore Verbinski is known for his Hollywood fare like *The Ring*, *Pirates of the Caribbean*,

Rango

, and

The Lone Ranger

, this effort doesn't feel like a studio picture. In fact, it reminded me in some respects of the equally bizarre 1994 Danish horror TV series,

The Kingdom

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Personally, I found it to fall under the category of a guilty pleasure. I can't defend the film as a great one. It's ridiculously repetitive. Subplots are introduced and then seemingly abandoned and the tale pretty much veers into camp territory by the final act. Still, the themes of power and

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eternal youth among the wealthy are intriguing, the plotting is at the very least unpredictable, its visuals are stunning to look at and the production itself admirable in its complete and reckless abandon.

Lockhart (Dane DeHaan) is a young, greedy corporate executive sent on an urgent trip to the Swiss Alps. He is asked to find his company CEO, who has suffered a mental breakdown and is in hiding at a private "wellness center". Upon finding the strange locale and meeting with physician/director Dr. Volmer (Jason Isaacs), Lockhart finds himself staying at the spa. He becomes obsessed with the history of the estate, including the wealthy Baron who used to conduct bizarre experiments on the property generations ago. Soon the protagonist begins experiencing strange visions and his own sanity is questioned.

Over the leisurely paced two-and-a-half hours, viewers are treated to surreal, head-scratching events that appear to be part psychological drama and part Universal monster movie. Just about every image takes advantage of the water motif, with steam-filled spa rooms, submersion tanks and electric eels (which disturbingly, end up swimming into all sorts of orifices). Even simple shots that would be throwaways in most films, like those establishing locales or one of a train running through the mountains, are creatively framed with unique and impressive angles. And there are some uncomfortable sequences, including a very unsettling dentist visit.

However, the film rambles so endlessly, it eventually reaches the point where one wonders if the intention was to make the viewer think they were trapped and also losing their mind. Strange scene after strange scene unfolds and when events are revealed, things become even more outrageous and larger-than-life. Everything about it screams B-movie, yet the performances are entertainingly tongue-in-cheek and production values are stellar, adding to the bizarre wonder of it all.

Admittedly, the movie is something of a mess. Still, as a gonzo experience that seems to break away entirely from convention, it had me hooked. I'm not sure if any of it makes sense (truthfully, it probably doesn't), but this surreal oddity is unlike anything else out there. If you're a patient viewer and don't mind a touch of the outrageous and surreal in your horror, you might get a little kick out of *A Cure For Wellness*.

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