

‘Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness’ provides plenty of frenzied fun

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Rating: ««««

out of «««««

Running Time: 126 minutes

This title from Disney and Marvel Studios opens in cinemas on May 6.

Fans of Marvel who saw the holiday hit “Spider-Man: No Way Home” will likely remember that the film introduced the concept of multiverses. For those who missed it, this term refers to alternate timelines with many of the lead characters making different life choices and existing in a world completely divergent from the one familiar to them. “Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness” takes this unique concept and runs with it.

After the events of the previous Marvel title, Doctor Stephen Strange (Benedict Cumberbatch) is recovering and regretting missed opportunities with ex-girlfriend Christine Palmer (Rachel McAdams). His personal problems have to wait after he comes to the aid of teenager America Chavez (Xochitl Gomez). She explains that she has the power to jump between universes, but cannot control the gift and is being hunted by an unknown, dangerous force.

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Strange approaches Wanda Maximoff aka Scarlet Witch (Elizabeth Olsen) for assistance, but things do not go according to plan. Strange and his compatriot Wong (Benedict Wong) find themselves being attacked by a villain bent on taking all of the youngster’s powers. This results in an unusual pursuit through all manner of alternate realities.

Truth be told, the first act of the feature is a little clunky and difficult to follow. Early on, there’s a lot of talk about multiverses as well as a book of sinister spells that turn those who use them evil.

And Strange’s visit to Wanda Maximoff results in a lot of references to the Disney+ series “WandaVision”. This story element makes up a significant part of the story. For anyone who hasn’t seen the aforementioned series, it’s a bit disorienting, leaving one playing catch up and trying to piece together the many onscreen relationships and their connection to the narrative.

The film moves at a very quick pace establishing all of the various plot threads, but this material feels rushed.

Eventually, the various bonds do become clearer and the film begins to build momentum. As the chase starts, characters jump to strange and far more brutal alternate worlds, encountering alter egos and other unexpected superheroes. A group called the Illuminati will certainly pique the interest of comic book enthusiasts. While what follows is often bizarre and disturbing, it does result in plenty of darkly amusing and intentionally jarring moments.

Director Sam Raimi (“The Evil Dead,” “Army of Darkness,” the 2002–2007 “Spider-Man” movies, “Drag Me to Hell”) employs high-energy camerawork that does make an impression. Throughout the tale, there are fantastic images of alternate universes. And when things go haywire, there are striking vistas of city skylines caving in on themselves.

Additionally, the movie contains some entertaining POV shots of monsters flying and attacking the heroes. And in addition to all the wild creatures on display, even simple set-ups like a watch being repaired are shot from unusual perspectives, adding a sense of humor and fun to the proceedings.

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And amidst all the chaos, the talented cast do eventually manage to offer some emotional weight to the story. Both Strange, Maximoff and even Chavez have a few moments to deal with either personal issues or horrifying traumas from their past. These elements eventually come together and are resolved in an effective and satisfying manner.

This film gets off to a rocky start and is a bit too choppy to qualify as the best superhero film in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, but it does manage to stand out thanks to a unique vision, as well as some wild and surprising twists and turns. In the end, “Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness” provides enough frenzied fun to entertain both casual and devoted comic book enthusiasts.

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