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Eric Tiansay

The doctor is in, and his practice is mind-boggling and, well, strange in Marvel Studio’s 14th superhero film.

In Doctor Strange, Benedict Cumberbatch stars as the titular character—a stubborn, egotistical neurosurgeon whose personal tragedy forces him to join a legion of sorcerers and learn the complexities of the mystic arts.

Along with its fantastical storyline and adventure, the film’s mind-bending CGI will leave moviegoers spellbound. However, the movie—which had a \$165 million budget—is a bit darker and violent than most of the Marvel films, which would be a concern for young viewers. Additionally, the film is steeped with Eastern mysticism and New Age tenets—with shades of the occult, including casting spells and conjuring an evil entity.

The movie begins with Strange involved in a horrific car accident—leaving his hands destroyed, which means he can no longer perform surgery. After trying western medicine for a cure, the doctor hears of a man named Pangborn (Benjamin Bratt), who broke his back, but somehow discovered how to heal himself.

Strange then heads east to Kathmandu, Nepal, where he meets Mordo (Chiwetel Ejiofor) and his master, the Ancient One

(Tilda Swinton), who holds the secrets of a hidden world of alternate dimensions and multi-universe. Under the teaching and guidance of the powerful bald mystic, Strange discovers metaphysical abilities and ultimately accepts the responsibility of protecting earth from other worldly danger.

“Heroes like the Avengers protect the world from physical dangers,” hard-nosed librarian/drill sergeant Wong (Benedict Wong) tells Strange. “We safeguard it against more mystical threats.”

The main threat is Kaecilius (Mads Mikkelsen), an ex-disciple who has stolen some key pages from the Ancient One’s most holy text relating to entry into the Dark Dimension—home of the villain entity called Dormammu. That’s when the time-and-space jumping kicks in the movie’s surreal special effects.

Stepping up the visual-effects innovations of The Matrix and Inception, Doctor Strange features buildings twisting out of shape, panes of glass rippling and entire street blocks folding in on themselves—allowing structures to bend over on themselves and characters teleporting. It’s almost overwhelming to watch the scenes with seemingly a million pieces moving yet focusing on the main characters.

Created by Marvel’s legendary artist, Steve Ditko, Doctor Strange is unique because he does not wear a high-tech, flying armor sure, and he doesn’t get his powers from a super serum nor gamma rays Strange’s New Age training places him in a vulnerable place where seemingly anything can happen.

Fan boys and girls of the comics will geek out about a variety of Strange’s ancient magical weapons to take on supernatural foes, including the cloak of levitation, the mysterious amulet called the Eye of Agamotto and the brass knuckle-like devices called Sling Rings.

With the tagline “Open your mind. Change your reality,” Doctor Strange oozes spiritual themes—albeit not the Christian

variety.

"I pushed your astral form out from your body, where the soul exist," the Ancient One tells Strange. She also encourages him to have his "mind elevated and spirit lifted."

The monastery-like setting in the secret Nepalese city of Kamar-Taj features followers of the Ancient One learning martial arts and philosophies about self-control. There is talk of gurus, sacred women, personal demons, holy healing, chakras, the power of belief and New Age utopia. Kaecilius' disciples chanting in a cathedral-like church building. The Dark Dimension supposedly gives eternal life and life everlasting, while Kaecilius calls Dormammu the savior of the world. Christians can turn these spiritual talking points into an opportunity to discuss Jesus as the only savior of the world, who offers true eternal life.

Best known for his work on TV's Sherlock, Cumberbatch sheds his British accent and is picture perfect as the Sorcerer Supreme with his cape, Eastern-style boot and goatee.

Directed and co-written by Scott Derrickson—best known for directing the horror films *Deliver Us From Evil* and *Sinister*—Doctor Strange features a redemptive origin story about a self-centered man who must be brought to the end of himself.

"This is a superhero movie about 'It's not about you,' " Swinton told the *Hollywood Reporter*. "It's actually saying that the most powerful thing that you can do with your life is live beyond ego and fear. And that's a rad thing to say in any circumstance, particularly these days."

Content Watch: *Rated PG-13 for sci-fi violence and action throughout, and an intense crash sequence, Doctor Strange is not ideal for younger children, so parents should exercise caution. There is some non-graphic bloodless violence, including persons who are impaled. A person slams to the*

pavement through a glass awning from an extreme height and the impact is shown. There are multiple surgery scenes where the wounds are shown being sewn or entered with surgical instruments. A man is slammed around by the head repeatedly by a magical cloak. There is a decapitation, but the head removal is shown in a shadow reflection. The car accident has slow motion shots of Strange's hands getting crushed. The post-accident shots of Strange are both bloody and kind of gruesome with all of the stabilizing metal work coming out of his hands and his face is disfigured and scarred. There is a scene where a Strange is attacked by three thugs who beat him to the ground and kick him repeatedly. There is a shot of a person being crushed by a building. A character is killed over in a variety of ways, including being impaled, in a time-loop sequence. Kaecilius and his zealots are scary looking with their blackened eyes. There are several expletives. After being forced to witness strange alternate dimensions, Strange questions whether he has been drugged and references LSD. A post-credit scene shows a character drinking some beer. {eoa}

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