



'Doctor Strange In The Multiverse Of Madness' Review: Raimi's Style Pulls The MCU Out Of It's Sandbox Just Enough

Posted by Murjani Rawls | May 10, 2022 | Film Reviews, Movies, Reviews | 0 | ★★★★★



A post-*Endgame* MCU has left many heroes broken, beaten, and scared. While most Phase Four stories have zeroed in on the ramifications of anguish, *Loki*, *What If?*, and *Spider-Man: No Way Home* have opened our eyes to multiverses, variants, and alternate timelines. Boasting a name like *'Doctor Strange In the Multiverse of Madness'*, it sets up an expectation to be an exploratory measure that would overload our senses. Who is itching to play in the MCU's curated sandbox with all these worlds and properties available at Disney's disposal?

You'll find that *Multiverse* is a relatively contained story with specific players on its stage. Doctor Strange (Benedict Cumberbatch) wakes up from a horrifying nightmare of a different version of himself and a dimension-jumping teen named America Chavez (Xochitl Gomez) running away from a demon. As a version of Strange dies, Chavez and a one-eyed tentacle monster cross over to New York and become the issue of our Strange and Wong (Benedict Wong). Doctor Strange as a character has gone through some personal transformations — from a selfish, self-serving doctor in his standalone film to the quippy, intelligent uncle figure here.

But even Steven Strange has his own set of post-snap regrets and what happiness means to a person — themes that permeate throughout *MoM* — or at least tries to. Director Sam Raimi immediately hits the ground running regarding how the plot reveals itself, interceding with the re-introduction of Wanda (Elizabeth Olsen) — who has fully embraced the Darkhold (an evil book of magic that corrupts those who use it). Wanda's storyline picks up from where we left her in *WandaVision*, where she has fully embraced being the Scarlet Witch. As Strange asks her for help with America, he then finds out Wanda is looking to embrace America's power to get to her two children in another universe.

If another version of you was fully content in a parallel world, would your current version rob that version for your own sake? This is a question *Multiverse of Madness* does better with one main character over the other. Raimi's directorial style illuminates through Scarlet Witch's Terminator-like transformation. Wanda's character is so overcome with everything she's experienced that she becomes corrupted by hatred. Through this notion, this is where the MCU allows itself to let its hair down and acquiesce to Raimi's clever, intriguing, and at times, extremely brutal usage of PG-13 horror motifs.

This proves to be a little tougher for Strange's character, who seems to have multiple pathways tugging at him. One is his love for Christine Palmer (Rachel McAdams) and Strange's regret about not entirely telling her how he feels. It also dives into Strange's choices throughout his arc in the MCU and how they affect everyone else around him — no matter the greater good of the decision, there's always a cost.

Multiverse catches its breath in the middle to introduce a bit of backstory for America, with a welcome introduction to the same-sex parents she's trying to get back to. Gomez's performance is great, playing a kid trying to understand the full extent of her power. The acting as a whole works — the standout being Elizabeth Olsen as an overpowered being hellbent on getting what she perceives is owed to her. The only issue is, in between the discovery and realization, America's character is used as a MacGuffin device.

Obviously, there has been a lot of anticipation concerning the cameos within this film (it's a multiverse movie, after all). While they provide some winks to previous projects in the Marvel catalog, they don't overstay their welcome. Certain characters' inclusion moves a particular piece of action over the top. That might be disappointing for people looking for this film to be an *Infinity War*-like event. When Raimi is allowed the space to insert his trademark quick cuts and macabre sensibilities, you can see what the MCU could become if it weren't so beholden to its formula.

Multiverse of Madness shows the audience a vast world still to be explored, but they pull back the curtain just before diving into it. That's the allure that keeps us coming back every time. As Marvel dives into more mature themes as projects roll out, it may need to get to break out of its mold in the way it tells stories.

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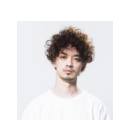


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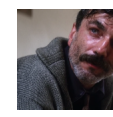
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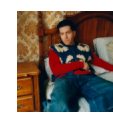
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