

Movie about Nicolas Cage's stay in Room 3327 of the New Yorker Hotel

Joe Kinney

Nicolas Cage delves into the mystical for *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*

By Ian Caddell

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LOS ANGELES—Love him or hate him, you have to respect Nicolas Cage's dedication to embracing the character he's playing. In order to feel comfortable as a wizard who throws balls of electricity from his hands in *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*, he did research on Nikola Tesla, a pioneer in the use of electric currents. In an L.A. hotel room, Cage says he felt there were several inexplicable coincidences that linked him to Tesla, who died in debt in a New York hotel in 1943.

"One of the more interesting things was that we wrapped the film on his birthday," he says. "I also found out, coincidentally, that the day he died was the same day I was born. I went to stay in his room at the New Yorker Hotel to try to see if I could call up the spirits, figuratively speaking, and see what came to me. Something hit the window, and I think it might have been a pigeon. I read a little about him and found out [that Tesla thought] they were his friends, and he cared about them. I decided to find a way to get a pigeon in the film and to fix his leg."

Not surprisingly, there is a scene in the film in which his character fixes a pigeon's leg. Balthazar is an ancient sorcerer who trained under Merlin of Arthurian legend and has spent centuries tracking down his mentor's killer. He recruits a New York nerd named Dave (Jay Baruchel) who has followed the teachings of Tesla and can control currents on his own. Their first order of business is to train Dave so that he can successfully confront Merlin's killer with sorcery that is beyond even Balthazar's mastery.

The movie, which opens Friday (July 16) in Vancouver, is partly based on a segment in Disney's iconic animated film *Fantasia*. Cage says that in addition to his interest in Tesla, he wanted to take the legends of King Arthur and apply them to a film that had the potential to move him in a new direction in terms of the movies he is being asked to make.

"This all started for me because I had an interest in the Arthurian mythology, particularly ancient England, and I was interested in making a movie that represented that. At the same time, I wanted to make a family movie that would entertain both parents and their children. I think that is one of the better ways that I can apply myself as an actor. It made sense to me that if I could develop a character that relied on magic and not bullets, I could entertain the family."

Cage had starred in 16 movies by the time he was 28, the age his costar Baruchel turned last April. As a younger actor, Cage had an intense style and a mature look that made him appear to be older and more experienced than his actual age suggested. (He was almost always the youngest man on set, and costarred with two women—Cher and Kathleen Turner—who were at least a decade older than him.) He says Baruchel also brings a unique element to the table, one that should serve him well over time.

"I love working with younger actors because they always come to the game full of energy and ideas that keep me learning something and stimulated. Jay is someone who subscribes to what I call 'jazz-style' acting. He is not afraid to go off the page and let you riff with him, and some accidents happen where you get to tell real truths. The other thing is the greatest actors are the ones who have voices that are mimicable. My heroes are [Humphrey] Bogart and [Clint] Eastwood and [James] Cagney and [Marlon] Brando and [Jack] Nicholson. Jay has a voice that is like that. When you see *How to Train Your Dragon*, his voice jumps out at you and he gets in your head. So I think he is going to be around forever."

Cage is a Coppola. His uncle and aunt are Francis Ford and Talia Shire, and Jason Schwartzman and Sofia Coppola are cousins. However, he reserves his greatest respect for his father, August, a professor of comparative literature who died last summer. He says that at his best, Balthazar is a mentor and a teacher, and that he wanted to pay tribute to the craft.

"It [the film] was also something that I wanted to do for teachers in general. I think it is an ode to teachers and sings their praises. It's for these people who are devoted to expanding young people's minds but they don't care about money. They just want to educate people. That was my father, so it was sort of my gift to him."

[Nicolas Cage Learned How to Be a Weirdo at the New Yorker Hotel](#)

By [Dan Duray](#)
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Nicolas Cage gave an interview to a [Canadian website](#) in which he reveals that he did some method acting for his latest role in *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*. To better become "[sorcerer and computer simulation expert](#)" Balthazar Blake, Cage stayed in Nikola Tesla's room at the New Yorker Hotel.

Tesla spent his later years in the hotel, and died there. Apparently his mythology plays into the film in some capacity, and Cage was all too eager for a chance to stay at the hotel, which is now [owned by Reverend Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church, the church and has no affiliation with the magazine.](#)

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Sure enough, the article says, a pigeon's leg is fixed in the film. You still probably shouldn't see it, though.