

Lucy (2014)

Rated R. Running time: 1 hour 30 min.

Our content ratings (0-10): Violence 7; Language 5; Sex/Nudity 1.

Our star rating (0-5): 4

Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves..."

Genesis 4:a

They eat the bread of wickedness and drink the wine of violence.

Proverbs 4:17

Peter Parker became the superhero Spiderman when bitten by a radioactive spider, so now in director/writer Luc Besson's film a girl named Lucy (Scarlett Johansson) becomes a super heroine through ingesting a substance known as CPH4 in a most unusual way. How this happens makes for an exciting introduction to this comic book-like tale in which the girl, at the end of the film, is transformed into a god who "is everywhere" when her mind is joined to banks of super computers.

The story begins in Taipei where student Lucy's one-time boyfriend tries to persuade her to take a briefcase with unknown contents into a tall building and give it to a designated man. Suspicious, she refuses, but then the guy snaps shut a handcuff onto her wrist, to which is attached the briefcase. Terrified, she has no choice but to enter the building while the guy watches from outside. Right after the man at the desk puts in a call, BIG, tough-looking goons

appear. Ex-boy friend is shot dead, and Lucy is roughly hauled up stairs like she was a sack of potatoes where the mysterious Mr. Keng (Choi Min-sik) confronts her. He is urbane looking, but that he is an utterly ruthless guy is shown by his cold bloodedly shooting anyone who displeases him. He alone could keep an undertaker busy working overtime.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the world, brain specialist Professor Norman (Morgan Freeman) is giving a lecture about what would happen if humans had access to higher percentages of their brains. Supposedly we use only 10% of our capacity at the present time, but what if...? His pseudoscientific talk is illustrated with all kinds of multimedia images, including a scene of Lucy, the hominid discovered in Ethiopia in 1974, said to be our ancestral link with primates over three million years ago.

Lucy is operated upon, the rogue surgeon inserting a plastic bag filled with the blue crystalline CPH4 into her belly. Three men also undergo the same operation. All four are given airplane tickets to four different cities, thus forcibly turned into mules as a part of Mr. Keng's global drug operation.

Lucy, however, while chained in a cell is sexually attacked by a thug. During the rough struggle she is hit in the belly, the blows breaking the bag and releasing the chemical into her body. Wracked with painful contortions as her brain cells are transformed, she discovers she has gained enormous strength, able to break loose and dispatch her attackers and escape from the heavily guarded area.

As Lucy sets forth on her escape, the camera keeps breaking away to Prof. Norman and his lecture. We also see at intervals the increased percentage of her brain that Lucy now employs—20%, 30%, 40%, and so on, her powers rapidly progressing so that she is able to translate Mandarin, read thoughts, manipulate matter and people, and more. Needing

additional CPH4 lest she die, her goal becomes that of apprehending the other three mules and obtaining their packets. This is where French police detective Pierre Del Rio (Amr Waked) enters the picture, the two pairing up when Lucy arrives in Paris. Of course, she soon links up with the Professor as well, and Mr. Keng and a small army of his goons are also hot on Lucy's trail, eager to get back their contraband. Wherever they go they leave so much blood and chaos that Quentin Tarantino would be pleased. And Lucy herself indulges in violence to get her way, even barging into an operating room and shooting the patient so that the surgeon can treat her by extracting the packet from her belly.

Scientists have long dismissed the idea that we use only 10% of our brain as myth, but this obviously doesn't bother Luc Besson, a thriller maker and not a science teacher. Caught up in the fast-paced action, you probably won't care either. The magisterial voice of Morgan Freeman could convince us that the Tooth Fairy exists, probably also backing up his claim with multimedia graphics. And Scarlett Johansson's performance as prey turned into predator is as good as her portrayal of the alien in [Under the Skin](#). For a summer escapist film, with about as much substance as the smog that obscures our cityscapes, this no doubt will draw a large audience.

Let me add one caveat to that last sentence. There is one really human moment in the film: it is Lucy's telephoning her mother from the operating room. By now the chemical has so increased her memory that she can recall things her mother is astonished that she knows about—the ways in which her mother cared for her as an infant and toddler, little things that most children never recall, and certainly never express their thanks for. Mom is perplexed and moved, and so are we, as Lucy signs off with an "I love you." It will be her last human moment before she eventually is transformed into a godlike form of existence tethered to computers.

That Lucy becomes god-like is underlined by a prehistoric

sequence in which our Lucy, somehow able to travel back in time, reaches out her finger to that of the hominid Lucy, an unmistakable copy of the famous Michelangelo painting on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Loved it, because it is also a tribute to the ape and the mysterious black slab scene in Stanley Kramer's *2001: Space Odyssey*!

Lucy follows in the line of a number of other strong female characters in Luc Besson's films. There was the Russian girl in *La femme Nikita* (1990); Leeloo in *The Fifth Element*; the Maid of Orleans in *The Messenger: The Story of Joan of Arc* (1999); and Michelle Pfeiffer's delightful mob wife in [The Family](#) (2013). The director even has turned out a biopic, one that that I am eager to see and report on, *The Lady* (2011)—*I find it hard to conceive of him, after helming so many violence-filled films, dealing with such an espouser of nonviolence as Myanmar's Aung San Suu Kyi.*

Although there are other filmmakers whose films I enjoy more—John Sayles, Wim Wenders, and Steven Spielberg among others—I can usually count on Besson for an experience that is exciting and provocative.

The review with a set of discussion questions is in the August 2014 issue of Visual Parables.