

Film Feature: The Marvel Comics Movie Awards

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on May 4, 2011 - 4:01pm

- [Captain America](#) [2]
- [Elektra](#) [3]
- [Fantastic Four](#) [4]
- [Film Feature](#) [5]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [6]
- [Iron Man](#) [7]
- [List](#) [8]
- [Marvel Comics](#) [9]
- [Spide](#) [10]
- [Spider-Man](#) [11]
- [Spider-Man 2](#) [12]
- [The Avengers](#) [13]
- [The Punisher](#) [14]
- [Thor](#) [15]
- [Tom Burns](#) [16]
- [X-Men: First Class](#) [17]
- [X-Men: The Last Stand](#) [18]
- [X2: X-Men United](#) [19]

CHICAGO – When “Thor” hits theaters this Friday, it will be 22nd Marvel Comics movie to make it to the big-screen since “Blade” rebooted Marvel’s box office potential back in 1998. There have been more Marvel movies if you count such Marvel-owned properties as “Men in Black” or “Kick-Ass” (or if you count the cheesy straight-to-VHS Marvel movies of the 80s and 90s), but “Blade” was the first “modern” Marvel superhero flick. Since it debuted, Marvel has been increasingly aggressive in bringing its superheroes to the big screen. This summer gives us three new entries into the Marvel canon – “Thor”, “Captain America”, and “X-Men: First Class” – and with “The Avengers” and the “Spider-Man” reboot currently filming, the Marvel movie library will be 30, 40, heck, 50-movies strong any day now.

In fact, there are so many Marvel superhero films in existence now, it’s practically its own genre – the Marvel Comics Movie. And, as we start on this summer full of Marvel, we decided to take a look back at the origins of the Marvel Movie genre and give you some of our picks for the best and the worst that the Marvel Movie machine has had to offer. Sit back, relax, and keep an eye out for that Stan Lee cameo, as we break down the highest and lowest moments in Marvel movie history.

Best Marvel Movie: “Spider-Man 2”



Spider-Man 2

Photo credit: Marvel Movies

Why?: Because it's the whole package. While most Marvel movies have primarily succeeded with individual moments – delivering us tasty little appetizers of geektastic fun within films that rarely live up to the promise of those delicious first courses — Sam Raimi's "Spider-Man 2," more than any other Marvel film, delivers a full, seven-course meal of awesome. It's got great performances, characters you care about, a story you can follow, pathos, pain, joy, a complex villain, a flawed hero, and some of the BEST superhero action sequences ever set to film. Sure, New York doesn't really have an elevated subway, Doc Ock's plan doesn't make a ton of sense, Aunt May sounds a bit too much like Yoda, and the "Here Comes the Bride" moment was pretty cheese-tastic, but the rest of the film is so confident and powerfully assembled that it just doesn't matter. "Spider-Man 2" is the "Dark Knight" of Marvel movies, and it definitely has set the standard for what a full-blown superhero movie SHOULD look like.

Runner-Up: "X2: X-Men United" (like "Spidey 2", the rare sequel that outperforms its original); "Iron Man" (the first 2/3rds are fantastic)

Worst Marvel Movie: "Fantastic Four"

Why?: Because it's an amazing concept executed TERRIBLY. And how do we know that the "Fantastic Four" was so terribly made? Because Brad Bird took, ostensibly, the EXACT same concept and turned it into "The Incredibles" – released one year before the FF movie – which stands as probably the single best superhero movie ever made. Granted, it's hard to live in the shadow of "The Incredibles", but, like it or not, that film set the bar for what a "Fantastic Four" movie could and should be. And director Tim Story – seeing that challenge – completely failed to deliver in any way, shape, or form. The movie looks painfully cheap, the action sequences are inept (some of the worst big-budget FX scenes ever filmed), the plot is filled with holes, Story WASTES his not-half-bad cast (the scene where he makes Jessica Alba strip down to her underwear for no apparent reason is particularly repugnant)... the movie flops spectacularly. And, sure, there are plenty of other bad Marvel movies, but most of them have either small moments of redeeming grace or only bungle B or C-list heroes. But the Fantastic Four are the first family of Marvel Comics – a franchise that should be as A-List as Spider-Man, X-Men, or The Avengers – and, in their first feature, absolutely NOTHING worked. They were treated worse than second-string picks like Blade or The Punisher and any true Marvel zombie should find that unbelievably depressing.

Runners-Up: "Elektra" (really, how good did you think an Elektra movie would be?); "Spider-Man 3" (like FF, HUGE potential wasted); "Punisher: War Zone" (incoherent)

Best Action Sequence: Nightcrawler Tries to Kill the President in “X2: X-Men United”



X2
Photo credit: Marvel Movies

Why?: Because it’s 2 minutes and 22 seconds of pure “squee!” Yes, it’s not as big or bombastic as the Hulk or Iron Man throwing down against an army of enemies, but it is, without question, THE most BAD-ASS moment in Marvel movie history. It takes one of the most underrated and fanboy-beloved X-Men ever – Nightcrawler, the swashbuckling, teleporting furry blue hero – and has him TAKE APART a full squad of Secret Service agents in the White House as he comes within an inch of assassinating the President. AND Bryan Singer has the stones to make this one of the first scenes in the movie. It’s as if he was directly responding to the critics who were underwhelmed by the action in the first “X-Men” film. The film opens and BAM! (Or should we say “BAMF!”) Alan Cumming’s Kurt Wagner is teleporting, punching, flipping, and destroying his enemies to the tune of a gorgeously overwrought Mozart soundtrack. The scene is fantastic – one of the best things Singer has ever shot AND it’s a fantastic example of how AMAZING superpowers can look on the big screen when a director creates the perfect sequence to show them off.

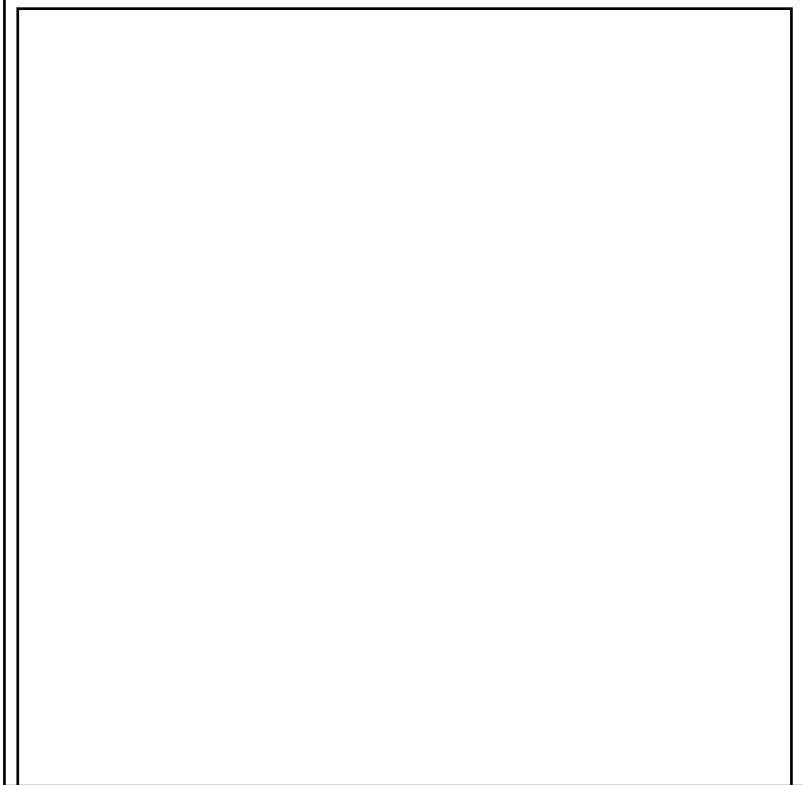
Runners-Up: Spider-Man vs. Doc Ock on the clocktower in “Spider-Man 2”; the aftermath of the opening blood rave in “Blade”; Hulk fights from the desert to San Francisco in Ang Lee’s “Hulk”

Best Kiss: The upside-down kiss in “Spider-Man”

Why?: Because it’s a no-brainer. In fact, it’s such a no-brainer that we almost didn’t even include this category. However, we left it in for two reasons. Reason #1 – it was a great concept for a kiss and, c’mon, it’s become an icon of pop culture that’s been parodied ad nauseum. Reason #2 – to illustrate how WEAK the romance has been in the Marvel movies we’ve seen so far. Like it or not, geeks, but comic books (particularly superhero books) are big ol’ soap operas, and romance has played a big role in most major comic sagas. So, that being said, why have we been so underwhelmed with Marvel movie romance so far? Jean Grey flirts a bit with Wolverine, Rogue flirts with Iceman, Pepper flirts with Tony Stark, Bruce Banner pines for Betty... there’s been a lot of middling tension, but no real passion. That’s why Spidey’s upside-down kiss is so significant and why we’re hoping that, in the future, Marvel will start making us fall in love with their characters falling in love.

Runners-Up: None (isn’t that sad?)

Best Performance as a Villain: Ian McKellen as Magneto





Magneto

Photo credit: Marvel Movies

Why?: Because even actors as compelling as Alfred Molina or Tim Roth simply can't compete with a Royal Shakespeare Company-trained Gandalf. Putting EVERYTHING that occurred in "X-Men: Last Stand" aside (more on that later), Ian McKellen created one of the most engaging and chilling movie villains ever with his performance as Magneto. It's the result of a flawless actor being given a beyond-complex character to play. Magneto is a fantastic villain because, let's be honest, he kind of has a point. This is a man who has had to watch as the world tried to exterminate him on two separate occasions – once for being a Jew, once for being a mutant – so the fact that he has absolutely no sympathy or compassion for the human race makes a lot of sense. You understand why Magneto has henchmen because he's an amazing leader and he has – what he sees as – a right and noble cause. And that sequence in "X2" where he breaks out of his plastic prison by sucking the metal out of a guard's blood? 100% bad ass. And there's simply no other Marvel movie villain who can compete.

Runners-Up: Alfred Molina as Doc Ock in "Spider-Man 2" (GREAT, but his motivations are just a bit too vague); Stephen Dorff as Deacon Frost in "Blade" (big, scenery-chewing fun); Liev Schreiber in "X-Men Origins: Wolverine"

Worst Performance as a Villain: John Travolta as Howard Saint in "The Punisher"

Why?: Because Travolta can do so, SO much better. Yes, there have been some other horrendously bad bad-guy performances in other Marvel movies, but none of them made us as sad as Travolta slumming it in a movie as lame as Jonathan Hensleigh's "The Punisher". The man almost literally sleepwalks through his entire performance and, the few times he does open his eyes, it's just to sneer and say crappy lines of dialogue. Travolta can be a fantastic actor when he wants to and he knows what it takes to make a cool, engaging bad guy (his performance in "The Taking of Pelham 1, 2, 3" is extremely underrated). But, in "The Punisher", he's so drab and lifeless, it's shocking. If you're going to fail as a movie bad guy, at least fail big - fail enormous bat-s*** crazy big like Colin Farrell in "Daredevil" or Wes Bentley in "Ghost Rider". But if you're going to be as boring as Travolta was in "The Punisher", why even bother cashing the paycheck?

Runners-Up: Julian McMahon as Doctor Doom in "Fantastic Four"; Dominic Purcell as Dracula in "Blade: Trinity"; Dominic West as Jigsaw in "Punisher: War Zone"; Josh Lucas in "Hulk"

Best Performance as a Hero: Robert Downey Jr. as "Iron Man"



Iron Man

Photo credit: Marvel Movies

Why?: Because NO ONE really went to see “Iron Man” to see the mechanical suit flying around. It was a nice touch, but, be honest, everyone in the world went to see “Iron Man” simply because of how jaw-droppingly charismatic Robert Downey Jr. was in the first previews. Downey KILLED as Tony Stark, and his performance elevates the entire movie. We hate to admit it, but there are a lot of dull stretches and plot holes in “Iron Man”, but you can barely tell because RDJ does such a Herculean job of holding the film on his oh-so watchable shoulders.

Runners-Up: Tobey Maguire as Spider-Man (such good angst); Hugh Jackman as Wolverine (because who the heck had heard of Hugh Jackman before he took that role and made it into his own?)

Best Costume: Spider-Man

Why?: Because it was a hard thing to pull off. Taking a costume that iconic and that complex and making it work on the big screen - without making it come across like a dancer’s leotard - couldn’t have been easy. Sure, they had to keep cheating to find ways to show us Tobey Maguire’s face – there are limits to how expressive the mask can be – but, on a whole, Sam Raimi’s design team really pulled it off.

Runners-Up: Iron Man (the suit looks cool, but it’s more FX than costume); Thor (Kenneth Branagh did an amazing job making a ridiculous-looking costume look fairly kick-ass)

Worst Costume: Green Goblin in “Spider-Man”

Why?: Um... maybe because they used up all of their costuming genius making Spidey look awesome? Who knows, but whoever decided that they should reimagine Spider-Man’s most iconic villain as a low-rent Power Ranger knock-off should be bitch-slapped by Tim Gunn ASAP.

Runners-Up: All of the X-Men in “X1” (those black suits already look crazy dated); Daredevil (red leather is rough to pull off)

Best Cameo (tie): Colossus in “X2: X-Men United” and Brian Posehn as the minister in “Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer”



Colossus

Photo credit: Marvel Movies

Why?: With the INSANE number of Avengers cameos in the recent Marvel Studios flicks and the obscene number of mutant cameos in the “X-Men” movies, these might seem like odd picks, but let us explain. First, the Colossus cameo is a must. He’s one of THE classic X-Men who didn’t make the cut for the first movie, so, when he shows up for 15 seconds to knock some evil SWAT guys through a wall in “X2”, the theatres we were in EXPLODED with geekgasms. Fine, he became much less cool in “X-Men: Last Stand”, but we’ll always remember his entrance in “X2”. And Brian Posehn? Here’s the thing: “Rise of the Silver Surfer” is a pretty lousy movie, but you have to love that the filmmakers took someone as cool and hilarious as Posehn, the confessed-fanboy stand-up who ruled in “Mr. Show” and the “Sarah Silverman Program”, and turned him loose as the guy trying to marry Reed and Sue. Sure, it wasn’t a perfect scene, but the casting alone KILLED us.

Runners-Up: Hawkeye in “Thor”(Go Renner!); Bruce Campbell in the “Spider-Man” movies

Worst Cameo: Stan Lee in “Spider-Man 3”

Why?: Because enough is enough. We love Stan and giggled at his first few cameos in Marvel flicks, but his cameo in “Spider-Man 3” was the moment where we finally got tired of seeing Stan the Man on the big screen. And it’s totally Sam Raimi’s fault. Having Stan walk past Hitchcock-style or accidentally drink some Gamma-radiated juice is a fun nod to his legacy as a comics creator. But having him walk up to Peter Parker and deliver hacky, overly on-the-nose dialogue like “You know, I guess one person can make a difference. Nuff said” – it just made us cringe. It sucked all the fun out of the whole “having Stan Lee show up” thing. Nuff said.

Runner-Up: R. Lee Ermey’s voice in “X-Men: Last Stand” (was it supposed to be funny?)

Best Movie Adaptation of An Existing Marvel Storyline: No Winners (yet)

Why?: Because Marvel has yet to make a superhero movie that successfully adapts one of its “classic”, published-first-in-comic-form stories. There have been minor elements from classic stories worked into Marvel movies, but most have either been a). terrible (more on that later) or b). really insignificant to the plot. Most Marvel movies so far have been rehashes of origin tales – which we’re not really counting as classic stories since those are almost myths at this point – OR brand new stories, not connected to comics continuity. Maybe that’s a good thing, but one day, it’d be great to see an honest-to-god adaptation of some canonical Marvel moments — Iron Man’s “Devil in the Bottle,” Spider-Man’s “Kraven’s Last Hunt”, X-Men’s “Days of Futures Past”, or “The Infinity Gauntlet” — on the big screen.

Runner-Up: Edward Norton’s “Incredible Hulk” DID do a nice job of adapting a lot of elements from Bruce Jones’ 2002-ish run on “The Hulk” – trying to control the Hulk, getting mysterious help from Mr. Blue – but it’s not enough to call it an adaptation.

Worst Movie Adaptation of Existing Marvel Storyline(s): “X-Men: Last Stand”



X-Men: Last Stand

Photo credit: Marvel Movies

Why?: Because Brett Ratner is a bad, bad man. Rather than, you know, write an original story to ruin in his take on the X-Men (which is the worst Marvel sequel, BTW), he decided to take not one, but TWO CLASSIC X-Men storylines, jam them into his horrible mish-mash of a movie, and ruin them for the ages. First, he stole elements from Joss Whedon's relatively recent run on "The Astonishing X-Men" – all about a mutant cure – and stapled them onto his slap-dash narrative. (What's worse, he took something as high-stakes as a mutant losing his powers forever and then totally reversed that decision in the film's closing seconds, making the whole exercise a total wank.) And, second, and most heinously, he took Chris Claremont and John Byrne's beyond-legendary "Dark Phoenix Saga", ripped out its soul, and made it the climax of the film. The "Dark Phoenix Saga" is one of the greatest comic book stories ever told, and rather than giving the tale its due, Ratner made it an uninteresting minor subplot for Famke Janssen that made ABSOLUTELY no sense. Ratner filled it with holes, killed Cyclops off-screen, let the Dark Phoenix stand limply behind Magneto for 50% of the film, and then finally ruined its perfect ending with a lame Wolverine sacrifice scene that PALES in comparison to the ending of the original. (The wounds still hurt, Brett.) While, yes, we'd love to see classic Marvel stories on the silver screen, if they're going to be mutilated and disrespected the way "X-Men: Last Stand" did, then let's simply not bother.

Runner-Up: "Punisher" (for how they awkwardly tossed in the boarding house gang and Russian storyline from Garth Ennis' first "Punisher MAX" story)

Most Underrated Marvel Movie: "Blade"

Why?: Because, as we mentioned in our intro, "Blade" started it all. "Blade" was the first Marvel movie that proved that a Marvel superhero movie could really, really work. All of the previous Marvel forays into film were bad, Roger Corman-quality, direct-to-VHS affairs, but, in 1998, when director Stephen Norrington took a D-list Marvel hero and turned him into a vehicle for the fading action star (and current prison inmate) Wesley Snipes, it was a revelation. There is no reason why "Blade" should've been good, but it unquestionably was. It was gory, funny, action-packed, surprising – the opening scene with the vampire rave being bathed by showers of blood was an amazingly fun shock the first time you saw it. It was, simply, a really well-done superhero movie that gave you great action, a cool origin tale, and a killer bad guy, all together in one package. And, pre-1998, Marvel had never been able to pull that off before. "Blade" was the proof-of-concept movie that essentially justified the existence of every Marvel movie that came after it. Fine, "Blade 2" was so-so and "Blade: Trinity" sucked, but, if you

enjoyed “Spider-Man”,” X-Men”, “Iron Man”, “Thor”, or any other Marvel movie since, you have “Blade” to thank.

By TOM BURNS
Staff Writer
HollywoodChicago.com
tom@hollywoodchicago.com [20]

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