

Mixed Bag of Marvel Tricks in ‘Avengers: Age of Ultron’

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on April 30, 2015 - 8:10am

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Rating: **3.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – Whew. There is so much going on in “Avengers: Age of Ultron” that you practically need a program to keep up with the players. This mixed bag has overwrought comic book action, head shaking plot points, and the usual Marvel angst that includes some riveting scenes.

Joss Whedon (“Buffy the Vampire Slayer,” “Firefly,” “Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.”) is the writer and director on this chapter, and adds layer upon layer to the copious amount of superheroes. Relying on the insight that the audience is fully invested in the Avengers – Iron Man, Captain America, Thor, Hulk, Hawkeye and Black Widow – Whedon piles on some new super faces and a prickly villain named Ultron. The story is comic book epic, but depends on the audience to keep up with it, while throwing in the usual titanic battle sequences. These confrontations are vast in scale, sometimes reducing the heroes to acrobatic CGI cartoon figures. You get everything you pay for when plunking it down for the Avengers, including more than you might possibly want.

The Avengers – Iron Man/Tony Stark (Robert Downey Jr.), Captain America/Steve Rogers (Chris Evans), Thor (Chris Hemsworth), Hulk/Bruce Banner (Mark Ruffalo), Black Widow/Natasha Romanoff (Scarlett Johansson) and Hawkeye/Clint Barton (Jeremy Renner) – begin the film by raiding the terrorist group Hydra, where experiments are being done on artificial intelligence, and twins Pietro (Aaron Taylor-Johnson) and Wanda (Elizabeth Olsen) Maximoff. The power source is in a magic scepter by Thor’s archenemy Loki, and the Avengers confiscate it for Tony Stark’s lab.



The Gang's All Here in 'Avengers, Age of Ultron'

Photo credit: Walt Disney Motion Picture Studios

This raid opens up the plot of the film, which involves Stark's use of the scepter to finish his "Ultron" (voice of James Spader) project, a global defense system. Ultron turns rogue, and battles the Avengers at their own headquarters, destroying Stark's robotics and reclaiming the scepter. Ultron retreats back to Hydra headquarters, builds a army of robots to use against the Avengers, and recruits the twins' powers of super speed (Pietro) and mind control (Wanda). This establishes the main conflict, and the Avengers are going to need a little help from their friends, including Nick Fury (Samuel L. Jackson), and some newly minted robot and mutant Avengers.

That plot description just scratches the surface. This is a highly complex story, and favors the ardent fanboy over the casual comic book movie observer. The Marvel comic movies don't pander to the walk-ins, there needs to be a working knowledge of their hero-and-villain universe to follow much of the action. But even experts might have some issues with the ping-ponging story – there are too many ingredients in the plot stew, and even a momentary mind drift can cause events and relationships to blur.

The complexity also bleeds into the action sequences. There is the usual high-end spectacle to them, but the tipping point is the computer generated forms of the human Avengers, which are beginning to look like animated ants that flip like Olympic gymnasts from one huge CGI prop to another. It's a bit unsettling, and reduces the sense of the Marvel Comics characteristic of human angst for the Avenger characters, especially when they go into inevitable battle. The producers didn't get this team together to talk about their feelings.

Yet it is that angst also serves the story, and one of the most effective uses of the mind control that Wanda possesses – Elizabeth Olsen is great in the role, by the way – is that she can project the Avengers into illusions of their own fears. Since Captain America is my favorite Avenger, his illusion is 1940s cool, and involves a cameo from Hayley Atwell (TV's "Agent Carter") as Cap's old love interest. These illusions are the energy that distinguishes the Marvel universe, and gives the film a more psychological foundation than just the computer generated battles.



Wanda Maximoff (Elizabeth Olsen) Does Her Thing in ‘Avengers, Age of Ultron’

Photo credit: Walt Disney Motion Picture Studios

There is a bigness to everything in this film, that seems to be the prime directive for every director who takes on this particular franchise. Joss Whedon’s contribution – since he also wrote the script – is to amp up everything, turn it up to 11, until the blaring images and story elements blend together in a superhero primal scream. Depending on your level of sensory and comic book perception, the reaction to it will most certainly vary.

This first film blast means the Summer movie season is upon us, and leave it to the Marvel universe to deliver it like a sonic explosion. Similar to the Avengers in the film, once this assignment is done, audiences across the land will be geared up to take on anything the Summer of 2015 has to offer. Ready, set...boom.

“Avengers: Age of Ultron” opens everywhere on May 1st, in 3D, IMAX and regular screenings. See local listings for 3D and IMAX theaters. Featuring Robert Downey Jr., Chris Hemsworth, Mark Ruffalo, Scarlett Johansson, Chris Evans, James Spader, Samuel L. Jackson, Elizabeth Olsen, Cobie Smulders, Anthony Mackie and Jeremy Renner. Written and directed by Joss Whedon. Rated “PG-13”



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