



Joss Whedon and his A Team

Buffy creator raises the superhero stakes with *The Avengers*

THE AVENGERS: Directed by Joss Whedon. Written by Whedon; story by Whedon and Zak Penn, based on the comics created by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby. Cinematography, Seamus McGarvey. Editors, Jeffrey Ford and Lisa Lassek. Music, Alan Silvestri. Starring Robert Downey Jr., Chris Evans, Mark Ruffalo, Scarlett Johansson, Jeremy Renner, Chris Hemsworth, Tom Hiddleston, Samuel L. Jackson, Clark Gregg and Cobie Smulders. Walt Disney Pictures, 2012. PG-13. 142 minutes. ★★★★★

It's possible that Joss Whedon's true calling in life is to write dialogue for Robert Downey Jr.'s Tony Stark. Or maybe RDJ was born to speak Whedon's quippy, pop-culture-laced dialogue, which sounds as natural coming from Downey's mouth as it did from Sarah Michelle Gellar's when she played Whedon's best-known creation, vampire slayer Buffy Summers.

Whedon didn't create the Avengers, but he clearly gets them, and he gets how to make a flashy, explosive summer movie that's gleefully fun and not entirely shallow. *Serenity*, the 2005 film based on Whedon's short-

lived TV show *Firefly*, now looks like a practice run for *The Avengers*: Snappy, swift and clever, *Serenity* follows a crew of misfits, each with a specific skill set, who mostly love each other even when they don't really get along.

I'm not sure the Avengers all love each other just yet, though Tony and Bruce Banner (Mark Ruffalo) share a chemistry that rivals their formidable intellects. (Please let the first sequel be *Bruce and Tony Do Science!*) History connects super-spy Natasha Romanoff (Scarlett Johansson) and Clint Barton (Jeremy Renner); hammer-wielding Thor (Chris Hemsworth) is only really in this fight because his treacherous brother Loki (Tom Hiddleston) leads the bad-guy brigade. S.H.I.E.L.D. director Nick Fury (Samuel L. Jackson) has his right-hand woman, the steely Maria Hill (Cobie Smulders), and Steve Rogers (Chris Evans), the long-asleep Captain America, has a boyish admirer in Agent Coulson (Clark Gregg), who really wants the Cap to sign his vintage trading cards.

Though he's not the only human around, Coulson often seems like the lone ordinary guy, the stand-in for all of us

who sometimes, secretly or not so secretly, kinda wish we could fight bad guys while tied to a chair, or zoom around in a shiny metal suit. But an intergalactic battle is a rough spot for a regular fellow. Loki, in exile on the other side of space, found a nasty alien race eager to take over the world for reasons unexplained. (It's a pretty nice world.) Loki also has some awkward ideas about humanity's need to be free of the troublesome notion of freedom. No one likes his ideas, or his outfit or the ease with which he steals the glowy blue tesseract (last seen in *Captain America*) out from under Fury's nose.

And thus, Fury calls in his big guns. *The Avengers* is so nicely pieced together — on second viewing, tiny scenes and brief lines prove to be completely, surprisingly relevant — that the heroes come for their own reasons, whether that be simple scientific curiosity, a chance to save a friend or a need to feel useful in the service of something meaningful. In quick, effective strokes, Whedon deepens Natasha's character; grounds the relationship between Tony and Pepper Potts (Gwyneth Paltrow) in genuine affection and clever banter; and finds a way to make the Hulk a truly scary side of skittish Bruce.

The Avengers wobbles a little toward the end, when the story is carefully structured to relieve them of difficult decisions. For these heroes, things just have to be done; skip the dicking about with questions of morality (even if those questions were raised earlier in the film). But maybe we needed a break from brooding superheroes (and *The Dark Knight Rises* is just over the horizon). Whedon's plot (he shares story credit with Zak Penn) does what it needs to do: gets its stars into the same room, with snarky asides, comedic quibbling, aggressive male bonding and, of course, a handful of satisfying action sequences. It's peppered with tidbits for superfans (and Whedon geeks) while perfectly accessible to those of us who don't have a Marvel dossier in our heads. And the Hulk gets to smash things. Is the sequel here yet? **EW**

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	5:45 8:15	Winner of the Cannes Film Festival Grand Jury Prize Golden Globe nominee for Best Foreign Language Film		4:50 7:00 9:05	2:45 4:50 9:05	2:45 4:50 7:00	4:50 7:00	4:50 7:00	4:50 7:00	4:50 7:00
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