

Movie Review - Iron Man 2

Written by {ga=mitch}

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The Summer Movie Season of 2010 is officially underway with the successful launching of “Iron Man 2”. It is not as good or as original as the initial 2008 film starring the irascible Robert Downey Jr. as the hedonistic, brilliant playboy Tony Stark...but that’s OK. It is still a movie that I feel is very much needed right now; a fun romp of a film with lots of action, humor, and interesting characters that doesn’t take itself too seriously.

Which means that those in charge at Marvel Studios may have finally “gotten it”. As successful as these comic book adaptations have been, all of them have had one thing in common; becoming too maudlin in subsequent movies. The X-Men and Spider-Man movies were both wildly popular franchises, but with each of them, every movie was more somber and depressing than the one before. And we won’t even get into the failures of two other Marvel Comic staples; Fantastic Four and The Hulk.

But with Iron Man, director Jon Favreau and screenwriter Justin Theroux did not let the fame and accolades of the first film go to their heads. They have kept what worked so well; focusing on the almost spooky symbiotic relationship between the life and times of actor Robert Downey Jr. and the man inside of the suit; Tony Stark.

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As the movie starts, Stark, who revealed his secret identity at the start of the film, is reveling in being an even bigger celebrity. His previously super-sized ego has now grown to a size that may consume the planet, and there are many scenes where you wonder if Downey might have actually written them from past experiences of his own bad-boy days.

This brings up a major difference between Iron Man and the rest of the Marvel stable of reluctant heroes. Find any Marvel comic, and you'll find a "hero" anguishing over his powers, at conflict with himself over his dual identities, quite often wishing that these powers that he never asked for would just go away.

With Stark? He invented his superpowers, relishes in using them, and has no inner demons forcing him to wage an internal battle between The Man and The Hero. They are one and the same in the case of Iron Man and Stark, and consequently, those of us in the audience can enjoy living vicariously through his computer aided eyes.

A movie without conflict, however, could be a bit boring, so we do end up with some internal struggle/stress for Stark. It seems that the power plant he created and put in his chest to save him is now killing him, with some type of "system waste" from the device poisoning his blood stream. Of course, Stark is too stubborn to confide in his closest friends Pepper Potts (Gwyneth Paltrow) or "Rhody" Rhodes (Don Cheadle). Instead, he just acts more and more erratic, including stepping down as the CEO of Stark Enterprises, placing his trusty Gal Friday Pepper in charge.

Internal conflict is all well and good, but there must be a villain (or two...or three), and this is where Mickey Rourke shines as Ivan Vanko, a drunken, bitter Russian physicist who blames Tony father for the ruin of his own father. So he creates his own glowing chest powerplant, hooks it up to a couple of nasty looking whips, and goes after Tony at a Monaco Grand Prix in one of the several well directed big action sequences.

The only real problem with the film is that once again Marvel Studios made the mistake of having way too many characters and conflict. Worst was the inclusion of Sam Rockwell as a rival weapons maker named Justin Hammer. Rockwell gives a mediocre performance, once again relying only upon smarmy smirks and over the top theatrics, and it's almost embarrassing to see him acting opposite of Rourke, who completely outclasses him.

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There is also the inclusion of Scarlett Johansson as Natasha Romanoff, aka "Black Widow". She is wonderful (as always) to look at, does a good job in her role, and has one absolutely awesome kick-ass scene, but again, it's just more and more things stuffed into a two hour movie.

My final complaint is in Marvel using this movie too much as an advertising piece for its upcoming Avengers movie. Samuel L. Jackson gets several scenes in this film, which is not a bad thing per se...at least as long as he's dealing with Tony as a mentor, rather than as an ad man pimping his show instead of focusing on the existing movie. It's all well and good that there will be a movie with Captain America, Thor, Hulk, and Iron Man all together; but right now, I want to watch "Iron Man 2", NOT a two hour Avengers commercial.

As a side note in that line, do not waste ten minutes of your life this time in hanging around until after the credits to see what is now a standard of Marvel movies; a final teaser scene. While this trick has been used to set up future movies in the past, or to reveal a secret, such as finding out that Professor X was still alive at the end of "X-Men: The Last Stand". This time? Nothing but seeing a final shot of Thor's Hammer sitting in the desert...as if no one knows that "Thor" is coming out next year.

Those quibbles aside, "Iron Man 2" works because Robert Downey Jr. is fantastic in the part. It works because Gwyneth Paltrow, Don Cheadle, and Mickey Rourke are three exceptionally talented dramatic actors who can take that skill to a popcorn action movie without any noticeable drop off (unlike Rockwell), and it works because Jon Favreau and Justin Theroux did not obtain Tony Stark level ego expansions after the first film, and remained true to what made it so good.

"Iron Man 2" won't go into any critic's Top 10 for 2010, but it will go into almost every critic's list of "recommended" movies. It was a movie I thoroughly enjoyed.

My Rating: Frank Ryan (3 footballs).