

## FRAME BY FRAME

### AVENGERS: AGE OF ULTRON REVIEWED

# "I'M ON THE SIDE OF LIFE."

Like my journey into deep space with *Interstellar* last November, my second cinematic adventure with the eponymous superhero team in *Avengers: Age of Ultron* was embarked upon with immense enthusiasm. However, I'm disappointed to say that I left the theater this



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time with a less positive frame of mind.

Set after the events of *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* (2014), *Age of Ultron* depicts the Avengers operating without the guidance of SHIELD, taking down the remnants of HYDRA across the globe. Just when our heroes believe the fight to be won, Tony Stark (Robert Downey Jr.) and Bruce Banner (Mark Ruffalo) develop a highly sophisticated artificial intelligence system, codenamed Ultron (James Spader), with the intent to provide Earth permanent protection from the Avengers' enemies. But when Ultron turns on our heroes, the Avengers must fight alongside their enemies to stop the rampant AI from annihilating humanity.

Now, this sounds like a riveting entry into the Marvel Cinematic Universe, but the final result of the heavily anticipated sequel to *The Avengers* (2012) left me unsatisfied and let down. Don't get me wrong, *Age of Ultron* contains redeeming qualities that make the film enjoyable, family-friendly and for some, a worthy sequel. The acting is on par with that of previous Marvel films, and the film is visually spectacular. And while a small percentage of the humor felt forced and awkward, most laughs still come naturally with *Age of Ultron*, as they did with the film's predecessor.

I definitely recommend that anyone interested in this franchise see the film at least once for the sake of continuity and to form their own opinion. It's certainly perfect for those who enjoy superhero action on a grand scale, but then where exactly did *Age of Ultron* go wrong for me? And proceed with caution because minor spoilers do lie ahead.

Oddly, the film's biggest problem for me was its villain.

Both the concept and character of Ultron were painfully rushed and delivered to the audience without any real time for digestion. Within the first 20 minutes of the film, Ultron evolves from a mere subject of discussion to a physical, self-aware character whose decided to exterminate the human race. Ultron's motivation for this objective is the archetypal scenario that all of humanity poses a threat to Earth. Two particular lines from Ultron to the Avengers highlight this point:

"How could you be worthy? You're all killers."

"There is only one path to peace: Your extinction."

This line of thinking is without a doubt chilling, but without a thorough origin or any proper development from Ultron, it becomes difficult for the audience to understand the

why behind it. And frankly, this is because there is no why. Ultron was simply born with his mind made up in this regard. And as far as Ultron's origin is concerned, Stark and Banner speak as if the concept for Ultron is one well-known to the audience, though we've never heard it mentioned once in any of the previous films.

This is one of many points illustrating *Iron Man 3*'s (2013) status as a wasted opportunity. Had Marvel decided to not develop *Iron Man 3* until after Avengers' release, a place in the story could have been reserved for the Ultron concept and early incarnations of the character, establishing a proper build-up for the villain's place in *Age of Ultron*.

One of the reasons I feel *Age of Ultron*'s predecessor is a superior is because the film's villain, Loki, was already an established character due to *Thor* (2011). When we watched Avengers, we knew who Loki was and understood his hatred for Thor, therefore understanding the motivation for his murderous actions. *Age of Ultron* lacking this type of development crippled both the film and significance of the Ultron character, making him a meaningless, antagonistic force.

Another issue I had with Ultron was that he wasn't evil enough for what I expected him to be. My expectations were fueled by the first trailer for *Age of Ultron*, released Oct. 22, 2014, in which Ultron is depicted as cold, sinister and without any sense of humor whatsoever. Ultron's spine-chilling line, "There are no strings on me," spoken at the end of the trailer tells the viewer that Loki is a child in comparison to this character, and the Avengers will have their work cut out for them this time around. This was not the case, however, with the Ultron depicted in the film. Instead, Ultron comes off as more of a comical antagonist dealing in witty speech rather than the implied devilish AI.

Another factor which hurt the film was that the *Avengers* seemed more overwhelmed by Loki and the Chitauri in the first film than by Ultron and his drones in *Age of Ultron*. This is a problem because a sequel is supposed to step up the game, particularly regarding what the protagonists have to deal with. Despite any of Ultron's actions in the film, Loki still comes off as the greater threat, and the fact he's still alive and wreaking havoc elsewhere is one unforgettably by viewers, making it potentially

difficult to fear Ultron the way one should.

All in all, *Age of Ultron* is a decent chapter in the second phase of Marvel films, but it's not the epic finale its predecessor was, and the majority of viewers are coming to the same conclusion, according to reviews and forum threads. We get some fascinating new characters, such as Scarlet Witch (Elizabeth Olsen) and Vision (Paul Bettany)—the latter of whom was the best part of the film in my opinion—and outstanding action sequences. But unfortunately *Age of Ultron* is only a film of great moments, not a great film overall.

I'm afraid I still hold *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* to be the best film of the Marvel franchise so far, and can only hope *Captain America: Civil War* delivers on some of the expectations I had for *Age of Ultron*.

Personally, I wanted *Age of Ultron* to be a darker, more apocalyptic film; with a villain so terrifying it almost wouldn't be suitable for young children. And some might say Marvel can't do that because it would undermine the severity of Thanos in the upcoming *Infinity War* films. But if that's the case, then perhaps the Ultron storyline shouldn't have been adapted at all.

## NEW FILMS THIS WEEK



### HOT PURSUIT

#### Hot Pursuit

PG-13 87 min Action | Comedy  
An uptight and by-the-book cop tries to protect the outgoing widow of a drug boss as they race through Texas pursued by crooked cops and murderous gunmen.

Director: Anne Fletcher  
Stars: Reese Witherspoon, Sofía Vergara, Matthew Del Negro, Michael Mosley

#### The D Train [Limited]

R 97 min Comedy  
The head of a high school reunion committee travels to Los Angeles to

track down the most popular guy from his graduating class and convince him to go to the reunion.

Directors: Andrew Mogel | Jarrad Paul  
Stars: Jack Black, James Marsden, Kathryn Hahn, Jeffrey Tambor

#### 5 Flights Up [Limited]

PG-13 92 min Drama  
A long-time married couple who've spent their lives together in the same New York apartment become overwhelmed by personal and real estate-related issues when they plan to move away.

Director: Richard Loncraine

Stars: Diane Keaton, Morgan Freeman, Cynthia Nixon, Carrie Preston

#### Maggie [Limited]

PG-13 95 min Drama | Horror | Thriller  
A teenage girl in the Midwest becomes infected by an outbreak of a disease that slowly turns the infected into cannibalistic zombies. During her transformation, her loving father stays by her side.

Director: Henry Hobson  
Stars: Arnold Schwarzenegger, Abigail Breslin, Joely Richardson, Laura Cayouette

#### Saint Laurent [Limited]

R 150 min Biography | Drama  
Yves Saint Laurent's life from 1967 to 1976, during which time the famed fashion designer was at the peak of his career.

Director: Bertrand Bonello  
Stars: Gaspard Ulliel, Jérémie Renier, Louis Garrel, Léa Seydoux

#### I Am Big Bird: The Caroll Spinney Story [Limited]

90 min Documentary | Biography | Drama  
Caroll Spinney has been Sesame Street's Big Bird and Oscar the Grouch since 1969; at 78-years-old, he has no intention of stopping.

Directors: Dave LaMattina | Chad N. Walker  
Stars: Caroll Spinney, Jim Henson, Frank Oz, Debra Spinney