The Avengers
PG-13
143 Minutes
Rating: *****
Perhaps the highest praise I can offer The Avengers is that it is exactly like a classic comic book story come to life. The epic scope, the hopelessly outnumbered team of heroes fighting for our lives, the diabolical villains, and action, action, and more action...it’s all here in one incredible live-action package. Is The Avengers the best superhero film ever made? Maybe not, but considering the grand scale and everything that had to come together just to avoid a bomb, it’s hard not to dismiss the few minor weaknesses and simply applaud what does work, which is after all nearly everything.

True, The Avengers is a very long movie, and if you haven’t seen the other Marvel superhero films (especially Thor and Captain America), it may take you a while to figure out exactly what’s going on. But this isn’t rocket science, it’s a comic book come to life, and it won’t take even a complete newcomer long to get up to speed.

Director and screenwriter Joss Whedon has to get a lot of the credit for making the film such a success. Whedon clearly knows and loves the characters he’s working with, and he wisely takes his time exploring each hero’s personality. Captain America (Chris Evans), Thor (Chris Hemsworth), Iron Man (Robert Downey Jr.), Hulk (Mark Ruffalo), Hawkeye (Jeremy Renner), and Black Widow (Scarlett Johansson) could have easily just been heartless blockbusters, but Whedon instills each of them with personal style and spirit. The banter between the various heroes as they slowly—and painfully—learn to work together is nearly as exciting as the inevitable showdown between the forces of good and evil.

Nearly, that is. The climax is one of the grandest spectacles of mayhem ever filmed, far surpassing the similar final battles that have been the apex of the various Transformer movies. As in the comics, the Avengers are brought together by the machinations of Loki, Thor’s evil brother, once again played to brilliant perfection by Tom Hiddleston. But this time Loki has an army of extraterrestrials backing him up, and it is suggested that there are other forces involved that may be even more wicked than Loki himself.

Throw in Samuel L. Jackson as Nick Fury, head of the clandestine S.H.I.E.L.D. organization, and you have everything a long-time Avengers aficionado could have hoped for. Incredibly thrilling, very well-acted and directed, with a witty script and heroes you can really believe in, at least for a couple of hours...The Avengers is an instant action classic.