

Captain America: Civil War (2016)

Rated PG-13. Running time: 2 hours 27 min.

Our content ratings (1-10): Violence 1; Language 2; Sex/Nudity 1.

Our star rating (1-5): 4

Happy are those who observe justice, who do righteousness at all times.

Psalms 106:3

May he defend the cause of the poor of the people,

give deliverance to the needy,

and crush the oppressor.

Psalms 72:4

Directors Joe and Anthony Russo and screenwriters Christopher Markus and Stephen McFeely have given us a treat of a film. One that's as filled with exciting (though unbelievable—but who cares in this fairy tale for adults?) action and the laughter-inducing dialogue we have come to expect from a Marvel Comics movie. And it shares an important plot line with the film from Marvel's rival world, D .C. Comics' *Batman Vs. Superman*.

In Lagos, Nigeria the villain Brock Rumlow/Crossbones (Frank Grillo) and his team of mercenaries ram a garbage truck into the Institute for Infectious Disease building and steal a vial filled with a deadly infectious substance. In a thrilling chase and bruising fight Captain America (Chris Evans), Sam

Wilson/Falcon (Anthony Mackie), Black Widow (Scarlett Johansson), and Scarlet Witch (Elizabeth Olsen), manage to regain the vial, but in the intense fight an explosion rips through the seventh floor of a hotel, killing numerous civilians.

The world-wide reaction focuses upon the death of the innocents, and not the defeat of the plot of those who would unleash a plague on the world. General Thaddeus Ross, the Secretary of State (William Hurt) tells Cap, "Captain, while a great many people see you as a hero, there are some who prefer the word vigilante. You've operated with unlimited power and no supervision. That's something the world can no longer tolerate." He informs them that 117 nations have signed a document called the Sokovia Accords. It decrees that superheroes will need to get approval for all future missions after the appropriate United Nations authority has reviewed the situation.

The Avengers (minus Thor and Hulk) argue over whether they should submit to the Accords or not. Steve Rogers/Captain America does not like the idea, whereas Tony Stark/Iron Man (Robert Downey Jr.) thinks it has merit. Other Avengers find themselves splitting off into two factions, painful though the process is. Rallying around Cap are Wanda/Scarlet Witch, Falcon, Winter Soldier, Hawkeye, Ant-Man, Agent 13. The opposing Avengers, led by Tony/Iron Man are Lt. James Rhodes/War Machine (Don Cheadle), Vision (Paul Bettany), Wanda/Black Widow, T'Challa/Black Panther (Chadwick Boseman), Peter/Spider-Man (Tom Holland). Other Avengers also show up later, such as Clint Barton/Hawkeye (Jeremy Renner) and Scott Lang/Ant-Man (Paul Rudd), the latter again proving that tiny size can be an advantage against a super-sized opponent.

I won't try to go more into the complex plot, except to say that the segment in which Tony Stark goes to Queens to recruit the young Spider-Man probably garnered the most laughs of any of the other entertaining segments of the film. For one thing

Aunt May this time has, like fine wine, improved with age—as played by Marisa Tomei she is more glamorous this time, turning even Tony’s head around. (Too bad she is given such short screen time!) Peter is very much the teen geek. Alone together in Parker’s room, Tony is not impressed by Peter’s costume, saying, “So, you’re the Spiderling. Crime-fighting Spider. You’re Spider-Boy?” Peter corrects him, “S-Spider-Man.” Tony, “Not in that onesie” “It’s not a onesie!” He then asks Peter, “You got a passport?” Chuckling because he hasn’t thought of traveling abroad at his age, the teenager replies, “Um, no.” “Ever been to Germany,” Start asks. Peter chuckles again because of the inappropriateness of the idea, “No.” “Oh you’re gonna love it there.” Grounded in the present, the surprised boy answers, “I... I can not go to Germany.” “Why not?” “Because I... I have homework.” “Okay I’m gonna pretend you didn’t just say that.”

Later during the furious battle at the Berlin airport Spidey, while struggling with the one-armed Bucky/Winter Soldier (Sebastian Stan), equipped with a super-strength metal arm, exclaims, “You have a metal arm? That is AWESOME, dude!” He also remarks to his comrades at one point, “Hey guys, you ever see that really old movie, *Empire Strikes Back*?” Taken aback, Rhodes says, “Jesus Tony, how old is this guy?” Iron Man replies, “I don’t know, I didn’t carbon date him. He’s on the young side.” (Tom Holland’s delightful performance makes us anticipate the promised new Spider-Man film.)

However, funny as the above exchanges are, I think the most laughter erupted when Marvels chief, Stan Lee made his usual cameo appearance, during which he asks, “Are you Tony Stank?”

The film’s basic issue as to the nature of the Avengers—heroes or lawless vigilantes—is a legitimate one. Convinced that General Ross and the United Nations are right, Tony says to his friend, “ Captain? You seem a little defensive.” Captain America responds, “Well, it’s been a long day.” Stark observes, “If we can’t accept limitations, we’re no better

than the bad guys.” “That’s not the way I see it,” the troubled Captain America retorts. During an exchange with Vision, after the latter has spoken about the program of enhancing the powers of people and the resulting problems it has wrought, Cap asks, “Are you saying it’s our fault?” (Meaning the bystanders killed.) To this Vision remarks, “Our very strength incites challenge. Challenge incites conflict. And conflict... breeds catastrophe. Supervision is not something to be dismissed out-of-hand.”

Part of the genius of Marvel’s writers is that they never let the sometimes-serious dialogue ruin the pace of the action. It is delivered quickly, and then we are soon back to the incredible computer-assisted chases, flights, and fights. I have often written that I am not a fan of the superhero genre, but as before, another Marvel Comics film has swept me along, thrilling to the feats of the Avengers and laughing, and sometimes thinking about, the dialogue delivered in such a whimsical style. I don’t know if this is the best of the Avengers film or not, a question that really doesn’t matter. I do know that whether you are young or old, this film can make your day.

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This review with a set of discussion questions will be in the May issue of Visual Parables