

Captain America: The Winter Soldier (2014)

Rated PG-13. Running time: 2 hours 16 min.

Our content advisories (1-10): Violence 3; Language 0;
Sex/Nudity 0.

Our star rating (1-5): 4

*Do not put your trust in princes,
in mortals, in whom there is no help.*

Psalms 146:3

“Trust no one!” Nick Fury tells our hero Steve Rogers/Captain America (Chris Evans) in this exciting Marvel Comics film. Co-directors Joe and Anthony Russo are skilled at integrating special effects enhanced battles and hand-to-hand fighting with dramatic and even tender moments so that this film stands out from the usual super hero movie. I am no fan of Marvel Comics and the intricate mythological world that Stan Lee and associates have created, but do appreciate the depth of character they instill in their characters which is carried over into the films.

Steve Rogers (Chris Evans) soon learns both the importance of Fury’s advice as well as its impossibility. Importance because when Fury, the head and center of S.H.I.E.L.D succumbs to wounds from an elaborate assassination plot mounted against him, Steve immediately finds himself targeted by the super secret government agency of which he has been an agent. His sole companions are Natasha Romanoff aka Black Widow (Scarlett Johansson) and Afghanistan veteran Sam Wilson aka the Falcon (Anthony Mackie). If he cannot trust them, then his chances of survival are nil. He faces implacable enemies, HYDRA, the

wicked organization formed by the Nazis led by the scientist Dr. Arnim Zola (Toby Jones) whose experiments have led to the creation of the supervillain known as The Winter Soldier (Sebastian Stan), plus Nick Fury's boss, Alexander Pierce (Robert Redford), Director of U.S. Security. The latter has obsessively pursued a science-based program that can predict who will become a threat to the security of society. Now that he can predict the future acts of persons he is willing to kill a few million people in order to preserve the security of the other seven billion humans. Only our three stalwart heroes stand in the way of the death of those millions.

Captain America, you might recall, is the result of a WW 2 government experiment in which an under-weight weakling was transformed into an almost indestructible soldier armed with a shield that is as valuable for its offensive as well as its defensive capabilities. Frozen in suspended animation for many decades, he is now like a fish out of water, struggling to adjust to a society that has moved far beyond that of the 1940s. In the first *Captain America* film he and Avenger members fought The Battle of New York in which they defeated an attack by aliens from outer space trying to take over Earth. Now he is playing catch-up to modern culture.

Some of the film's humor arises from the first meeting up of Steve and Sam: first, while Steven is jogging around a D.C. park, he keeps lapping Sam, who is also out jogging. "To the left," he calls as he passes Sam time after time. After all, he is a superhero, and Sam, an ordinary mortal, though fans know that the latter has a secret invention that will make him a valuable ally. Another touch of humor comes when Sam shows his new friend around town. We see Steve take out a little notebook in which he has made such notes need for him to catch up on what he had missed during his long sleep: "Berlin Wall [Up & Down]," "Steve Jobs [Apple]," and "Star Wars/Trek," "Marvin Gaye," and "Moon Landing."

There are also some warm, tender moments, such as Steve's

visit to the nursing home where his 1940s girlfriend Peggy Carter (Hayley Atwell), now in her late 80s, is confined. He also visits incognito The Smithsonian where he sees a display of pictures of himself as Captain America: with his cap partially hiding his face, no one recognizes him—except for a boy, who keeps his silence when Steve, noticing him, places his finger over his lips.

For those who have seen the first *Captain America*, there is a note of surprise and poignant remorse in the revelation of the identity of the Winter Soldier. At their climactic fight Steve is almost stunned to find out who his deadly adversary is, so much so that in their final battle he lays aside his shield and stops resisting. It is a scene comparable to that of the one in *The Return of the Jedi*, wherein Luke Skywalker lays aside his light saber to embrace a more powerful force than violence. People of faith will at least inwardly cheer this moment testifying to the power of a brotherly love that is stronger in Steve than even the will for self-preservation.

Yes, there are many surprises in what could have been just another action/adventure yarn with a complicated plot full of bloated computer-generated special effects. The film is also up to date in dealing with current issues. Redford's Pierce can identify the 20 million or so people who threaten stability by gathering intelligence on every citizen around the world through gathering and mining information on them from their email, phone calls, credit card data, FaceBook, and any other electronic databank that includes them. Sound familiar? Edward Snowden is not mentioned in the film, but the script is certainly indebted to him. I haven't enjoyed a superhero movie as much since the first *Ironman* movie—and the hero of the current one is far less cynical. There is a lot of good material for a group to ponder and discuss.

The full review with a set of discussion questions will be included in the May 2014 issue of Visual Parables.