

## Downey back as bon vivant billionaire/smart aleck superhero

Written by Kam Williams

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This film represents the seventh installment in the Marvel Cinematic Universe series kickstarted by "Iron Man 1" in 2008, and since followed in succession by "The Incredible Hulk," "Iron Man 2," "Thor," "Captain America" and "The Avengers."

The sensible question I suppose you're probably interested in having answered is whether the franchise is showing any signs of running out of steam or if it's worth investing in yet another

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episode.

Great news! The movie more than lives up to its billing as the first blockbuster of this summer season. Yes, the plot remains true to the basic comic book adaptation formula in that it pits a superhero against a diabolical villain bent on world domination.

However, Iron Man adds a little more to the trademark mix of derring-do and visually-captivating special f/x thanks to Robert Downey, Jr.'s bringing so much charm to the title character. Downey again delights, delivering a plethora of pithy comments, whether playing bon vivant billionaire Tony Stark or his intrepid alter ego.

Also reprising their roles are *People Magazine's* reigning Most Beautiful Woman in the World Gwyneth Paltrow as Iron Man's love interest Pepper Potts, Don Cheadle as his best friend Rhodey, and Jon Favreau (the director of episodes 1 and 2) as chauffeur-turned-obsessive chief of security Happy Hogan. And critical additions include Ty Simpkins as Harley, Iron Man's prepubescent, new sidekick and Sir Ben Kingsley as The Mandarin, the maniacal spokesman for an international terrorist organization.

The point of departure is Bern, Switzerland on New Year's 2000 which is where we find Tony Stark declining an offer to go into business being made by Aldrich Killian (Guy Pearce), a disabled scientist who ostensibly covets an experimental drug being developed by Stark Industries botanist Dr. Maya Hansen (Rebecca Hall). The storyline immediately fast-forwards from Y2K to the present as a string of bombings are being ostensibly orchestrated by The Mandarin.

Against his better judgment, Tony dares the madman to a fight, and no sooner is his oceanfront home leveled by a barrage of incoming rockets. Fortunately, a number of Iron Man outfits were left unscathed and, with the help of precocious Harley and pal Rhodey (aka Iron Patriot), he proceeds to get to the bottom of who is really behind the attacks bombings.

Far be it from me to spoil the surprising developments which ensue en route to the big showdown, suffice to say brace yourself for an array of visually-captivating stunt work interrupted intermittently by comical, tongue-in-cheek comments courtesy of our smart aleck protagonist. Patient audience members willing to sit through the long (and I mean long) closing credits will be duly rewarded with a brief session of Iron Man decompressing on the shrink's couch with Dr. Bruce Banner (Mark Ruffalo).

In sum, a worthy addition to the vaunted Marvel franchise.

Excellent (4 stars)

Rated PG-13 for intense violence and brief sensuality.

Running time: 130 minutes

Distributor: Walt Disney Studios

To see a trailer for "Iron Man 3," visit:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aV8H7kszXqo>