SMASHING SUMMER
FOR SUPERHEROES!

Is this the best year ever for comic-book movies?

Words by Leo Graziani

The summer of 2012 was a great time to be a geek. Let's get more specific: cinematically speaking, I've been in "Nerdvana" since about 2000, when comic-book movies erupted into the mainstream movie-going consciousness.

Full disclosure: when it comes to movies, I'm fairly easy to please. I don't care about figuring out the twists of the plot; I'd rather enjoy the ride and let the movie surprise me. A lot of the things cinephiles obsess over, I wouldn't notice. But there are two things I do care about in comic-book movies: the portrayal of the characters and whether or not the movie captures the spirit of the comics.

It's all too easy for fanboys to rant about how the movie isn't like the comic, and how this tiny and likely insignificant detail was wrong and so on, but what they fail to realize is that a film can't ever be like the book. They're different mediums, and changes have to be made for a story to work as a film. But if filmmakers can bring to life on screen what I've been imagining in my head, if they can re-create that internal magic, you've got a successful movie.

So with that in mind, is this really the best year ever for comic book movies?

I think so. Take a look at that timeline. In most years since 2000, we generally get a bunch of mediocre to bad films, some good films, and the occasional knockout like *Spider-Man 2*, *X2*, *Hellboy*, *Batman Begins*, *The Dark Knight*, *Iron Man* and *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World*.

But this year feels different. This summer has seen three monster comic-book films: *The Avengers*, *The Amazing Spider-Man* and *The Dark Knight Rises*.

Why do these films work? Because, as far as I'm concerned, they got the characters right. Character is everything—if they're

believable, I'm in. *The Avengers* worked because the portrayal of the team, especially Hulk and Tony Stark, was accurate. Andrew Garfield's awkward Peter Parker was the heart of *The Amazing Spider-Man*, and Christian Bale's relentless yet broken Bruce Wayne drives *The Dark Knight Rises*.

Sure, these films all have their flaws, but at their core, they embody and reflect the comics, and that's what counts. The fact that they're all dazzling spectacles doesn't hurt, either. Look at *The Avengers*. It was a box-office-smashing, popcorn-munching summer blockbuster, and I loved every second of it. Joss Whedon got it right. It's the best of the three by far, and the only one with a Blu-ray release I can't wait for.

All of this makes me wonder: what is it about superhero movies that makes them so appealing? Is it simple nostalgia? Is it a desire to be saved, and if so, from what? Is it, as some people like to say, a refusal to grow up? Is it a moment of escape from a world that seems more harsh and cynical the older you get? Or do we just like seeing the good guys win? There's probably an element of truth in all of those potential explanations, but I, for one, think it comes down to this: we want to recapture a little childlike wonder and rampant imagination.

Show us a big angry green dude smashing a god of mischief like a cartoon rag doll. Show us a shy geek suddenly blessed and burdened with great power. Show us someone who fights for justice from the shadows. Light up our brains with fanciful tales. Let's get our eyes off the ground and stick our heads in the clouds a bit. We need more idealism; a jolt of hope. That might be asking a lot from a superhero film, but for me, that optimism is an important contribution a comic book movie can make to our real-world view.

COMIC BOOK MOVIE TIMELINE ▼

1978 Superman	2006 V for Vendetta
1981 Superman II	▶ X-Men: The Last Stand
1983 Superman III	2007 30 Days of Night
1984 Supergirl	▶ 300
1986 Howard the Duck	▶ Fantastic Four:
1987 Superman IV:	Rise of the Silver Surfer
The Quest for Peace	▶ Ghost Rider
1989 Batman	▶ Spider-Man 3
1990 Archie: To Riverdale and	2008 The Dark Knight
Back Again	▶ Hellboy II: The Golden Army
▶ Teenage Mutant	▶ The Incredible Hulk
Ninja Turtles	▶ Iron Man
1991 The Rocketeer	▶ Punisher: War Zone
1992 Batman Returns	▶ The Spirit
1994 The Crow	▶ Wanted
▶ The Mask	2009 Watchmen
1995 Batman Forever	▶ X-Men Origins: Wolverine
▶ Judge Dredd	2010 Iron Man 2
▶ Tank Girl	▶ Jonah Hex
1997 Batman & Robin	▶ Kick-Ass
▶ Men in Black	▶ The Losers
▶ Spawn	▶ Red
1998 Blade	▶ Scott Pilgrim vs. the World
2000 X-Men	2011 Captain America:
2001 From Hell	The First Avenger
▶ Ghost World	▶ Green Lantern
▶ Josie and the Pussycats	▶ Thor
2002 Road to Perdition	▶ X-Men: First Class
▶ Spider-Man	2012 The Avengers
2003 American Splendor	▶ The Dark Knight Rises
▶ Daredevil	▶ Dredd
▶ Hulk	▶ Ghost Rider:
2004 Catwoman	Spirit of Vengeance
▶ Hellboy	▶ The Amazing Spider-Man
▶ The League of	
Extraordinary Gentlemen	**UPCOMING**
▶ The Punisher	2013 Iron Man 3
▶ Spider-Man 2	▶ Man of Steel
▶ X2	▶ Sin City: A Dame to Kill For
2005 Batman Begins	▶ Thor: The Dark World
▶ Constantine	▶ The Wolverine
▶ Elektra	2014 Captain America:
▶ Fantastic Four	Winter Soldier
▶ A History of Violence	▶ Guardians of the Galaxy
▶ Sin City	▶ X-Men: First Class 2
▶ Superman Returns	TBA The Avengers 2