

Why the Marvelous Box Office?

With more than \$1.3 billion worldwide so far, *Marvel's The Avengers* is the kind of box-office success studio executives in Hollywood dream about. *John Carter* was not. They both had incredible computer graphics. What's the difference?

Let's start with the obvious.

First: The characters in *The Avengers* have been in successful solo movies of their own. Iron Man has had two solid hits. *Captain America*, *Thor* and *The Hulk* did pretty well themselves. *The Avengers* was like a multi-movie sequel.

Second: The real brilliance. The movie didn't start right out with *The Avengers* happily joining forces to combat evil. The characters had to get over their own pride in order to work together. It's a problem we all face. Look at any organization trying to accomplish anything worthwhile and you'll find people with different ideas about how to accomplish tasks. People can't quit working together every time they don't get their own way or get the recognition they believe they deserve. The movie has a profound premise: To succeed, you must sacrifice your pride and work together.

Movies thrive on conflict. The premise that superheroes must overcome their own conflicts in order to successfully combat evil is much more powerful entertainment than just good guys versus bad guys. It also makes the scenes where they do come together to whoop the bad guy a lot more fun when it happens.

The third magic ingredient is empathy. Audiences want good reason to root for someone. A superhero is nothing without a super reason to consider him heroic. *The Avengers* did a great job of getting audiences excited about each member of the team.

The fourth ingredient was unselfish sacrifice. By the end of

the movie, each of the characters was laying down his life to help the other team members defeat the enemy. Even Iron Man, who comes across early in the movie as a rather arrogant hotshot, rides a rocket in what appears a suicide mission to save the others. Self-sacrifice is inspirational. It's biblical. It's also good for the box office.

The fifth part of the tasty recipe is patriotism. Audiences love patriotism. The concept of defending your country—or, in many superhero movies, your planet—is thrilling. It's the reason many people join the military.

Audiences come away from *The Avengers* both entertained and inspired. This is not as true with *John Carter*. Forgoing the heroic opening of the original book on which it was based, *John Carter* starts out with the title character looking less than likable. While he gradually becomes more likable as the movie develops, he just never earns the level of audience empathy earned by *The Avengers*.

Iron Man is a little like Captain Jack Sparrow. He has character flaws, but he has a sense of humor and measure of spunk that makes him highly entertaining. You can root for him to get set straightened out by someone at the same time you root for him to eventually get what he's after. Indiana Jones movies did well because Indy was a spunky, bold character.

Finally, *The Avengers* did not chase off audiences with gratuitous foul language, unnecessary sex and nudity or attacks on religious beliefs. It even has a line of dialogue favorable to those who believe in ethical monotheism, one God. There was also a reference to the biblical story of Jonah and the whale, which Jesus alluded to when teaching about His upcoming death and resurrection.

Studios that think they can match the success of *The Avengers* with lots of CGI need only look at *John Carter* or *Battleship*. To match the entertainment value of *The Avengers*, what you

need is a clean, immensely entertaining, patriotic script.

The original *Star Wars* was one of the greatest hits of all time because its ground-breaking special effects were just used as background to a tremendous story with diverse, wonderful characters having to learn to work together to overcome evil, without a lot of foul language or other off-color material (does that sound familiar?).