Rating: ««« out of «««««

Running Time: 135 minutes

It seems like it has been only a short time since a superhero film opened in cinemas... wait, it *has* only been a few months since the last title. Regardless, audiences should prepare to be inundated once again with the arrival of the first of three Marvel Comics adaptations coming this year. Thankfully, *Black Panther* is a solid addition to the franchise cannon and one that should provide viewers with plenty of action and thrills.

The story involves the African nation of Wakanda. After the passing of King T'Chaka (John Kani) in a bombing (depicted in the *Captain America: Civil War* film), Prince T'Challa (Chadwick Boseman) ascends to the throne and inherits the superhero identity of Black Panther. It is revealed that despite its outward appearance as a poor farming country, Wakanda is the most technologically advanced nation in the world.

It reportedly all has to do with a mineral called vibranium found beneath the surface of the earth. The new King sets out to find the nasty Klaue (Andy Serkis), who not only wants to steal vibranium but is also the man responsible for the death of T'Chaka's father. However, in hunting Klaue down, the hero encounters a bigger foe in the form of Erik "Killmonger" Stevens (Michael B. Jordan). His plans involve usurping T'Challa, taking power for himself and starting a worldwide revolution.

While this is largely a comic book character origin story, one of the benefits in this instance is the relative newness of the character. Comic fans may already be familiar with Black Panther, but for those like myself who aren't up on all the heroes, a completely new addition to the line-up adds a great deal of freshness to the proceedings. There's a remarkable, unseen world to explore in the hidden kingdom of Wakanda as well as several original characters that keep the events vibrant and help the plotting from feeling too familiar.

Of course, the downside to setting a foundation is that there are multiple people, positions and powers to introduce and it often takes a while for things to really get going. This movie is slightly overlong and does take a bit of time to get the basic information out and find its rhythm, but certainly improves as it progresses. T'Challa is a charismatic and likable hero and even the fury of villain "Killmonger" Stevens should be relatable and understandable, adding some additional layers to the superhero shenanigans.

And the female protagonists of the Wakanda, including operative/love interest Nakia (Lupita Nyong'o), warrior Okoye (Danai Gurira) and teenage inventor/sibling Shuri (Letita Wright) are involved in all of the action. While there is some overuse of CGI during a car chase and a climactic fight, the fisticuffs and physical battles are dynamic and well-handled, with these conflicts thrown in just when the *Game of Thrones*-esque exposition and talk of kingdoms and thrones begin to weigh the pace down. Truthfully, not all of the one-liners work either, but enough of them hit the mark to lighten the mood and keep the tone from getting too bogged down in seriousness.

Black Panther isn't perfect, but it is a solid and entertaining superhero movie. The energy and passion on the part of the cast and crew is visible and they add a welcome jolt of liveliness, as well as something new and vibrant, to the very familiar Marvel Universe. In the end, superhero fans should be happy with what they see.

NOTE: And yes, there are two post credit scenes. They aren't as memorable as some of the others we've seen in past features, but the latter does involve the reintroduction of a character seen in previous Marvel films.

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By Glenn Kay

For the Sun