By PATRICK HALL
The Wilson Post

One month from today, this summer’s potentially biggest blockbuster is opening in local theaters, and “The Avengers” will signal the comic book movie industry’s greatest achievement, after over a decade of billions earned.

While the film certainly doesn’t need more hype, “The Avengers” is the story of a group of clashing personalities and grandiose heroes coming together to fight a common enemy. It’s a huge gamble for Marvel Worldwide Inc. (Marvel Comics) and Disney (who now owns the comics giant).

The film is the culmination of about four years worth of planning by Marvel Studios President Kevin Feige, who has produced all of that studio’s films thus far, and many others.

“The Avengers” brings Captain America (**Chris Evans**), Iron Man (**Robert Downey**, **Jr.**), Hulk (**Mark Ruffalo**) and Thor (**Chris Hemsworth**) together with supporting heroes Hawkeye (**Jeremy Renner**) and Black Widow (**Scarlett Johannson**) under the leadership of Nick Fury (**Samuel L. Jackson**).

They must all set aside their differences to face Thor’s evil brother Loki (**Tom Hiddleston**) and an army of aliens invading the Earth. Typical summer blockbuster stuff, you know.

The films that directly lead into this summer’s blockbuster to end all blockbusters are: “Iron Man” (2008), “The Incredible Hulk” (2008), “Iron Man 2” (2010), “Thor” (2011) and “Captain America: The First Avenger” (2011).

The May 4 release of “Avengers” comes almost 10 years to the day, after what is widely considered the movie that spawned the major comic book film business, Sony’s 2002 film “Spider-Man.”

Starring **Tobey Maguire** as Peter Parker/Spider-Man, the film brought in over $821 million worldwide for Sony and spawned two sequels, one in 2004 (“Spider-Man 2”) and 2007 (“Spider-Man 3”). Both sequels made more money than the previous installments.

That’s been the trend the past decade, movies focusing on major comics properties and characters have generated an unthinkable amount of money. Since 2002, comic book movies based on major characters such as Spider-Man, Iron Man, the X-Men, Superman and Batman have amassed a staggering $9,375,000,000 worldwide.

But thus far, the most financially successful and the best-reviewed comic book movie to date is “The Dark Knight,” from 2008, which grossed over $1 billion worldwide. The film starred **Christian Bale**, as Bruce Wayne/Batman and most notably, was the last complete film starring the late **Heath Ledger** as The Joker.

It’s no doubt that Marvel has been the leader in converting their properties to films, even if they don’t own the film rights to all of their characters. Prior to the 2008 release “Iron Man” starring Downey as Tony Stark/Iron Man Marvel launched its own production studio.

Since then they have released multiple films that have all tried, and succeeded at bringing the spirit of comics to the silver screen. “The Avengers” will mark the sixth film produced by Marvel

Studios, but to date, only “Iron Man” and “Iron Man 2” have been rousing box-office successes.

“The Avengers” promises to be the pinnacle of what has been a comic-book decade at the box office. I expect the film to surpass the money making power of “The Dark Knight,” which is the third-highest grossing movie in American history behind “Avatar” and “Titanic” and is 11th worldwide.

This summer’s comic book extravaganza will generate powerful numbers the first weekend simply due to the fact that no other comic film has attempted this type of premise to date. Not only will comic book fans turn out in droves, but moviegoers who fell in love with these characters through the five lead-in films will also show up.

The movie actually opens a week earlier around the world and the strength of its’ showing internationally, will show how well you can expect the film to do here at home. The latter two Marvel films, “Captain America” and “Thor” didn’t perform as well as the two Iron Man installments.

While “Thor” had an underwhelming performance in the United States, it made more money internationally, which is understandable, considering the character is based on the Norse mythology.

“Captain” performed poorly internationally, mainly because it’s difficult for the international community to be pushed a tale of a guy running around and calling himself “Captain America.” Marvel even knew the pitfalls of this, marketing the film only as “The First Avenger” in many foreign countries.

But thankfully, “The Avengers” has one sure-thing going for it, and that is Downey’s charisma and power that proved so crucial to making “Iron Man” a success. Fans will flock to see how the character blends with these other larger-than-life personalities.

But “Avengers” cannot be just another CGI epic of good guys triumphing over bad guys, if it wants to ensnare the masses. Last year’s comic book flop “Green Lantern” was full of beautiful

CGI, but its characters were empty and one dimensional and its writing poor.

Thankfully, “Avengers” is relying on director and co-writer **Joss Whedon**, who is known in many circles as a profound writer of strong, character-driven narratives. He’s written television shows, helped co-write “Toy Story” (1995), and has written many comic book issues as well.

While “Avengers” is facing off against the “The Dark Knight Rises,” the final installment of **Chris topher Nolan’s** Batman trilogy and sequel to “The Dark Knight,” I feel “Avengers” will ultimately win the day.

If you haven’t seen any of the films released by Marvel Studios, you’ve got a month to get your hands on them if you choose to know what is going on in “The Avengers.”

Moviegoers that haven’t seen any of the lead-in movies could very well be completely lost if they decide to check out “Avengers” on a Friday night next month.

“Avengers” would need to make more than $500 million to be considered a success, anything less than that and I would say the majority of the movie-going public rejected the grand experiment.

However, if Avengers becomes the highest grossing comic book film ever, not to mention one of the highest grossing films ever, you can be sure the comic book movie industry will only gain momentum after such a powerful decade.

“The Avengers” opens in local theaters on Friday, May 4 and is not-yet rated. All statistics and numbers were drawn from www.the-numbers.com.

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