

FEATURES

REVIEW: ‘Avengers: Infinity War’ (spoiler-free)



Published 2 years ago on April 27, 2018

By **Chris Compendio** 



(This review is intended to be spoiler-free, only referencing plot points shown and implied by the main two trailers and some television spots.)

In the lead-up to *Avengers: Infinity War*, I had an unusual question on my head. While friends and colleagues pondered, “what if *Infinity War* sucks,” all I had in mind is “how can *Infinity War* suck?” what specific ways can this film fall short and disappoint?

With me, it always comes back to the promises that the filmmakers made. The directors and screenwriters obviously did not give too much away about the movie in interviews, but unbeknow

to those who regularly digest comic book movie news and content, they essentially laid out exactly what this movie would be.

1. This would basically be a series of vignettes, citing Robert Altman's nearly three hour long ensemble film *Nashville*.
2. It would feel like a "smash-and-grab" heist movie from the 1990s.
3. It is the culmination of ten years of storytelling, and would bring in plotlines from all of the previous films.
4. **Most importantly, this was a movie with Thanos, our main villain, as the primary character.**

I can tell you that the movie was almost all of that—yet, the film still completely threw me off guard.

The filmmaking team of directors Anthony & Joe Russo and screenwriters Christopher Markus & Stephen McFeely brought us *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* and *Captain America: Civil War*, the former being an air-tight, efficient and satisfying film, with the latter basically being a practice *Avengers* film, juggling multiple storylines and character arcs. Regardless of your opinion on the character decisions in *Civil War*, it's hard to deny that it was a well-structured film.

I am having a hard time discerning any sort of story structure in *Infinity War*.

We all know at this point how the characters are divvied up through the film: Tony Stark, Doctor Strange, Spider-Man and most of the Guardians of the Galaxy eventually end up on Titan. Steve Rogers leads his team of secret Avengers with Falcon and Black Widow, eventually picking up Scarlet Witch, Vision, War Machine and Bruce Banner to meet up with Black Panther and company. Meanwhile, Thor goes on his own sidequest with Rocket and Groot.

The biggest surprise of the film to me was that all of these scenes and sequences had time to breathe. Despite having to cram so many characters into one film, the film never felt rushed, and the individual scenes were paced well with appropriate dramatic and comedic beats.

The film revels in its unexpected character team-ups, but it never feels like a child mashing their action figures together—rather, it results in some entertaining and intriguing character interactions. A good amount of comedy is extracted from Thor and the Guardians, the Guardians being perhaps the comedic highlight of the entire film. Stark and Strange butt heads, which at first felt a bit contrived but grew into an interesting (albeit, still antagonistic) relationship. And we get more from some established relationships already, with Tony being more of a dad to Peter Parker, for example. And while it's disappointing that most of Vision and Scarlet Witch's romance happened off-screen, their plotline is one of the more fully realized arcs in the film.

But therein lies the problem, as some characters completely got the shaft in terms of character development. You'd think that the *Captain America* directors and writers would be biased to give Steve some meaty story, but despite some memorable action beats there was little to even be said

about his character. Bruce Banner gets a mini-arc with his inability to turn back into the Hulk, but it goes absolutely nowhere save for repetitive verbal arguments with his inner self.

Perhaps it all makes more sense when you think back to the promise of Thanos being the main character. With audiences and critics may have been disappointed by previous Marvel villains, it was delightful to see Josh Brolin emerge as the MVP of the cast. It's easy to groan at the trailer selling the idea of Thanos wanting to wipe out half of the universe, but this film made a large effort to explain motivations. We're used to our villains being gruff, mischievous, eccentric or even quippy, but Thanos was none of those.

While I was hoping that Thanos would be more than a giant brute, I didn't expect displays of emotional vulnerability and even a sense of homeliness from who we are told is the antagonist; this was particularly evident in the scenes that he shares with Gamora. So when some of our many Avengers lash out at the Mad Titan and tell him he'll never understand the tragedies and strife they had to experience, we as audience members know in the back of our heads that he truly does.

And that's what this film, with all of its characters and locations and plotlines, was ultimately about: loss. Pardon my French, but *Infinity War* takes place in a time after all of our characters have had their shit kicked out of them. We see how exhausted and damaged and aged these characters are, from Thor's eyepatch and haircut to Steve's worn-out suit and long hair. Thor and Peter Quill at one point exchange sob stories, summarizing the insane and tragic events of *Thor: Ragnarok* and *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2*. And as Tony tells the other characters, his own visions of loss in the future have plagued his mind for years.

It's a theme that works, and it ultimately serves Thanos the most. So subverting expectations of what an MCU movie is, our villain ultimately has the fullest character arc.

However, it's a bit difficult to track this arc in this long and epic film. While I stand by my complete love for the film that each individual scene and sequence had a nice rhythm and flow to them, the way in which these scenes are stitched together into a single film didn't exactly sit well with me. Many times throughout the film, after we transition from one scene to another, I said to myself "oh yeah, I forgot this was happening." While it's fantastic that these scenes got the time that was needed to be successful dramatically, it was time in which everything else that is happening in the film slowly leaves your mind, and returning to other locations gave a sort of whiplash effect. It ultimately felt like the whole was not greater than the sum of its parts.

Adding to my disappointments was the musical score from famed composer Alan Silvestri. Despite some excellent and appropriate use of his primary *Avengers* theme, the score ultimately felt middling, and did little to nothing to enhance any of the emotional beats of the film. I couldn't hone in on a distinct musical motif for Thanos, and I was disappointed that no character themes, not even Silvestri's own *Captain America* theme, were referenced—the closest the film came to that was a copy-and-paste of Ludwig Göransson's *Black Panther* theme in an establishing shot for Wakanda.

(**EDIT:** Months later after rewatches, I completely take this back. The score really amplifies the high emotional beats of the film. I was a fool.)

On the positive side, as expected, this film had plenty of crowd-pleasing “epic” moments that had audience cheering, yelling and clapping. The action is a bit more CGI-heavy than we’re used to from the Russo brothers due to the supernatural and science fiction nature of these characters, but certain sequences brought out the best of the characters’ power-sets. The most impressive of these was Team Iron Man’s attempt to remove Thanos’s gauntlet, with Tony, Strange, Spider-Man and all of the Guardians really going all at it with their respective powers in ways we haven’t seen on screen. It was truly a comic book nerd’s dream.

But switching back-and-forth from the action on Titan to the battle of Wakanda only seemed to prove my gripe about the editing and “structuring.” Right as we get invested into one of these sequences we abruptly switch back, interrupting action beats that should be heartstoppers like *Thanos throwing a damn moon*. And with the larger scale battle at Wakanda, don’t expect something along the lines of Helm’s Deep in *The Lord of the Rings*; unfortunately for this fractured action sequences, there was rarely a sense of geography and space, and the whole affair felt weightless despite an impressive setup and amazing visuals.

So having watched and analyzed these films for the past ten years, and with my intense emotional and intellectual investment in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, I think I can say with some authority that *Avengers: Infinity War* does not suck. Its flaws are evident, but perhaps with this many characters and plotlines, they were mostly unavoidable, which requires the audience to forgive a lot. I came out of this film boggled and wondering what the heck they can do next with the story. The story ends with a resolution that is risky—but thinking back to how comic book events work, the risk could be averted with retcons and reset buttons.

Avengers: Infinity War is predictably fun and entertaining, while also being unusually dark and containing a real storyline for its villain. I certainly did not hate it, but it’s hard for me to formulate a final opinion when we have a sequel to wrap everything up next year. I predict that hardcores such as myself will appreciate the film, with everyone else on the fandom spectrum, with general moviegoer audiences at the end of said spectrum, will be divided, and quite possibly alienated.

This will not be the film that they expected.

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Published 1 year ago on January 11, 2019

By **Brooklyn Wallace** 



PUNISHER SEASON 2 REVIEW

On January 18, *The Punisher* will be back on Netflix, with **Jon Bernthal** returning to keep the character alive on a platform where Marvel shows have been producing great quality, but still haven't been able to survive. Fans were first introduced to the character in *Daredevil* season two, where fans learned the backstory of Frank Castle, a veteran and father, whose family was killed in front of him after returning from war. When Castle returned to Netflix for his stand-alone series, we got a slightly altered background story, focusing on his war buddy, Billy Russo, played by **Ben Barnes**, as a force behind the killing of Frank's family that day by the carousel.

Season two of *The Punisher* has some strong moments, particularly in the beginning. While season one hinted that Castle's fighting days may be over, as he took the identity of Pete Castiglione and sat in on some group therapy, season two shows that Pete is just as much of a fighter as Frank.

The first three episodes are the best of the season. These could stand-alone as a new series about Pete...

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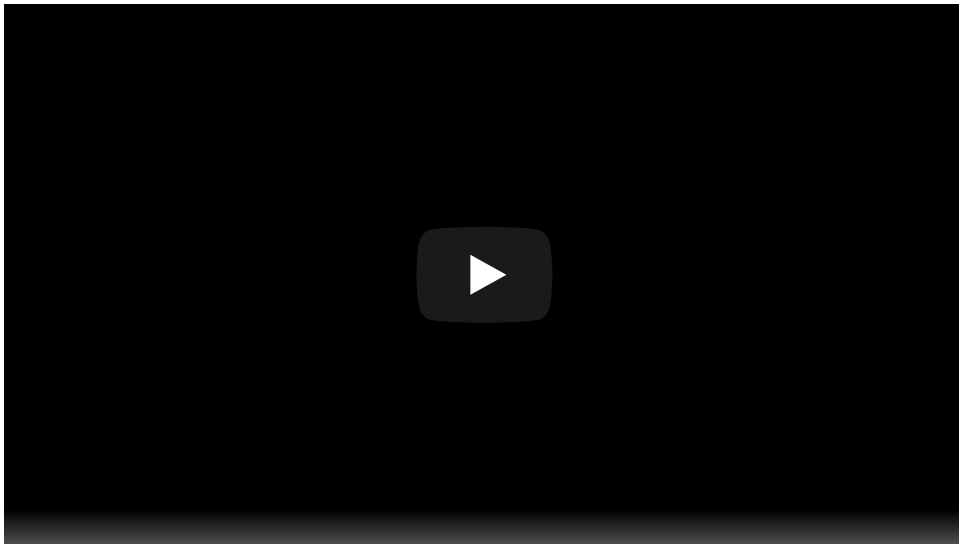
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By **Caleb Borchers** [Twitter](#)



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How Daredevil Season 3 Depicts the Fight Against Real and Present Fears



Published 1 year ago on November 27, 2018

By **Chris Compendio**



(Content Warning: mass shooting tragedies in the United States; Spoiler Warning for *Daredevil* season 3)

Those living in the United States have gotten too accustomed to bad news. Every mass shooting, wildfire, and other various tragedies have become distilled to push notifications on phones and headlines on cable news. I've felt a certain guilt for an increasing indifference as the bad news has increased in volume, but I felt this even more so when the news finally reached me personally. The Tree of Life shooting in Pittsburgh set something off in me, as I went to school mere miles away from there, and I visited Squirrel Hill for leisure and errands regularly. I felt sorrowful and uneasy knowing that such a nefarious act was committed in an area I once considered to be practically my backyard.

It had an eerie and troubling effect on a piece of media that I treasured, as only a couple of weeks before this real-life tragedy, Netflix released season 3 of *Daredevil*, which prominently featured a

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