

HOPE LIES AT 24 FRAMES PER SECOND

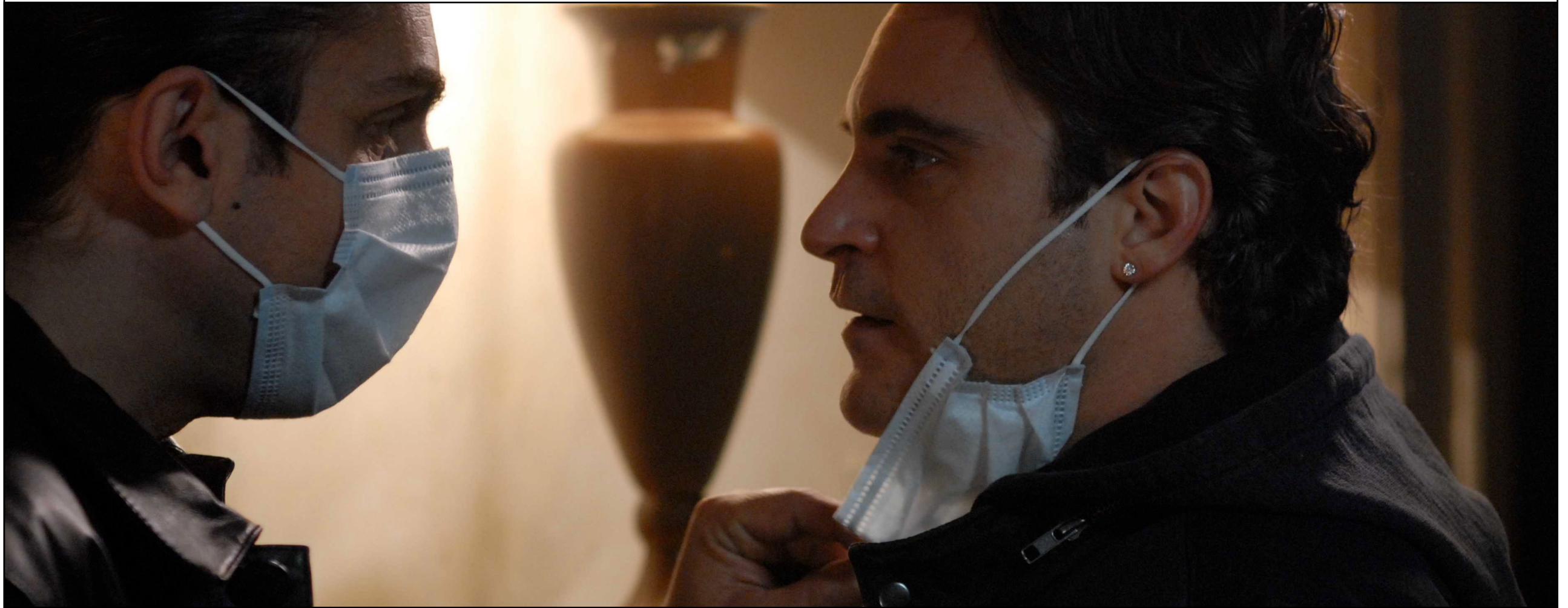
# The Avengers



A Hope Lies Monograph

INTRODUCING

# The Hope Lies Monograph



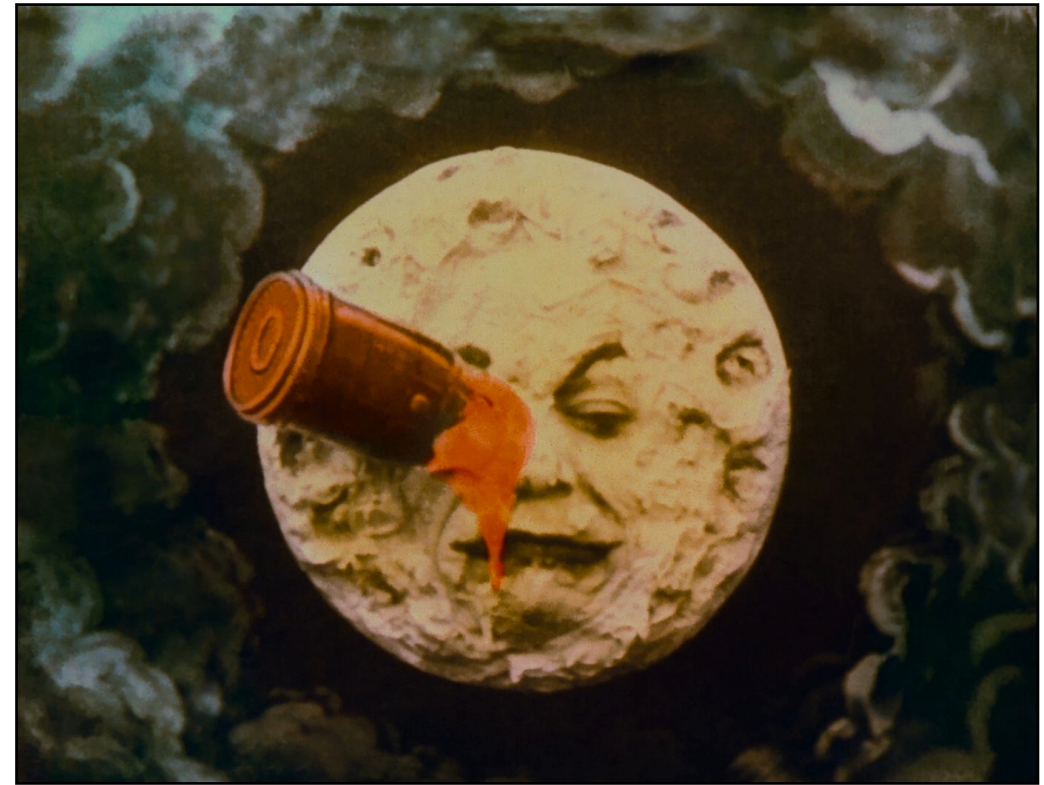
Welcome to the second Hope Lies Monograph (We're repeating this introduction from the first edition). Hope Lies at 24 Frames Per Second is an independently run film website based in the UK. Over the course of the last two years Hope Lies has built itself up from simple blog to being one of the most respected film websites in the UK (and, we're told, the 16th most influential in Europe...).



Cinema fascinates us. Every facet, from the latest Aki Kaurismäki feature to the most over the top blockbuster that Hollywood has to offer, gives us something to mull over, debate or be passionate about. Our long held tagline on the website has been "*From A Bout de Souffle to Zabriskie Point, Hope Lies at 24 Frames Per Second attempts to cover every corner of the cinema spectrum*" and that stand remains as strong as ever: we have a passion for the cinema that knows no bounds, and we hope that these Monographs reflect that.

Technology also fascinates us, which is why we've decided to experiment a little with this Monograph that you hold in your hands. We are utterly convinced that the future of reading delivery is digital: it's convenient, it's good for the environment and ultimately it provides a very satisfying reader experience. We say this as fans of what publications like Film Comment, Cinema Scope and Empire Magazine have been doing with their digital alternatives to their traditional publications, and if we can replicate/mimic one iota of the great work being done by those institutions then we'll be happy. As with any experiment there will no doubt be issues at first, but we thank you in advance for helping us to resolve any that may crop up.

Our aim with the website has always been to remain as influence-free as possible, so we're looking to instill similar innovative methods of delivery here too: we want to keep this free, but we don't want to be overly reliant on advertising (We appreciate just as much as anyone how mass advertising can ruin a clean user experience). Feel free to get in touch if you would like to be involved with that aspect of the Monographs.





This Monograph is designed to be read in landscape orientation. That's when it looks its best. If you'd like to read it sans film stills and whatnot then simply turn it to portrait scale.

Each Monograph, as the title suggests, takes a look at one film. There's no defining reason for why a film might be subjected to coverage, but it's probably a given that a timely theatrical release will lead to featuring. With that in mind we do have a mammoth special edition in the works in which we'll be taking a look at the complete oeuvre of a specific filmmaker to mark an anniversary, but more on that later.

In closing, we would like to thank you for downloading and giving this inaugural monograph a shot. Any feedback will be really appreciated.





MONOGRAPH

# The Avengers Review



There's an appropriate moment in the current issue of The Avengers comic-book (vol. 4 #25) in which an optimistic Thor tells a crestfallen Captain America that he is always at his best when he "bucks the system". This throwaway frame in an unrelated book sums up Marvels unorthodox path to the big screen perfectly. While it's easy to smite at the big bad wolf that is Hollywood, we sometimes fail to recognise when a genuinely ambitious project makes it through the harsh waters of mediocrity. And what ambition it is that has brought The Avengers to the big screen. Four years and five films make up the DNA of this landmark project, with the fate of not one, but four individual franchises resting on the success of this one movie.



# The Avengers (Whedon, 2012)

## Noteworthy

1. The Avengers is the sixth film in the Marvel Cinematic Universe series.
2. Mark Ruffalo is the third actor to portray Bruce Banner/The Hulk, following in the wake of Edward Norton and Eric Bana.
3. The Chitauri, the alien race featured in the film, are probably better known as the Ultimate Marvel Universe's equivalent of the Skrulls.
4. There's not one, but two post-credit sequences attached to the film. The second was shot on the same night as the film's premiere took place, and is only available on the US print of the movie.
5. The Avengers will be followed by Iron Man 3 and Thor 2 next year, while a Captain America follow-up is due in 2014.



*Steve Rogers (Chris Evans) stumbles across his new costume.*

While many of my formative years involved being a big Marvel fan, I have to admit that the Avengers nary touched me. The Hulk was the exception. His compadres, well the 'Classic' lineup, here replicated in Joss Whedon's film were on my radar, but for all of the wrong reasons. The 11-year old me considered Captain America

to be hokey, a relic that bore no resemblance to the world in which I lived (deepest, darkest West Yorkshire). Iron Man, the billionaire playboy inventor was B-list Marvel to the Spider-Man and X-Men orientated youth of I. And Thor, and the side of the Marvel Universe that that particular character represented just confused me. Aside



from a slight flirtation with the group in 1996 during one of their advertised jumping-in points (the since rebooted reboot 'Heroes Reborn') I had little to no contact with the three non-Hulk members of The Avengers until the best part of a decade later. In the years since that later reappraisal I've come to admire each of the characters in their own way, with Ed Brubaker's Captain America holding the award for "My Favourite Comic-book Series Ever". So, it was with that newfound respect for the characters that I entered in to 2008's Iron Man. The years that have intervened between that film and this, Tony Stark's fourth outing in almost as many years, have seen us wander "the road to The Avengers", as the marketing slogan for a hypothetical major comic-book crossover event might put it, culminating in one of the most ambitious films ever produced by the American film industry.

One word left the screening of The Avengers with this writer. Pure. Marvel's The Avengers might just be the "purest" and all-out superhero film ever captured on film. It's the cinematic equivalent of one of Marvel's annual cross-title events. Imagine a literary work like Civil War, or Secret Wars, only instead of being played out across the pages of a dollar twenty-five comic-book it takes place on the grandest cinematic scale possible.

The film itself sees the titular Avengers titularly Assembled (in the UK at least) to take on a power far greater than their individualities are capable of handling. Loki, the trickster God, has returned from the fate deemed upon him in the closing moments of 2011's Thor, albeit with an even greater chip on his shoulder and with the Chitauri in tow (the Chitauri being the Ultimate Marvel Universe version of the Skrulls, the Marvel Universe's most formidable alien adversaries, withheld from Whedon thanks to rights problems) he

poses a very real threat to the future of mankind. Cue the assemblage, an act put in to place by Nick Fury, the eye-patch-wearing government agent whose presence has been felt throughout much of the series thus far.



Miraculously each of the Avengers seems to have equal screen time, an act made all the more impressive by the unforced manner by which this is achieved (nothing feels forced). While some had speculated that The Avengers would merely be the Tony Stark show, an Iron Man 3 with a grander title, one might be relieved to find that this most certainly isn't the case. Stark's is the one story given a thorough emotional byline, but at the same time it isn't as though the others suffer. The rich humour that might just be the films most successful element comes initially with the coming together of the various characters. While some have speculated that this bickering hints at events to come (Civil War?) that takes away from the natural leanings of these characters. Such behaviour is much more suited to these characters than one might give them credit for (the original *raison d'être* of the superhero super-group

was the quirk that saw the gang fighting with each other just as much, if not more, than the evildoers that they were supposed to be at war with). Such rivalries are tradition in the Avengers. Speaking of “evildoers”, the big bad at the heart of The Avengers is a returning Tom Hiddleston, as a Loki even more twisted and malevolent than before. Hiddleston is fast becoming one of the real greats of British cinema, with his rise over the last 15 months or so (since



appearing in Joanna Hogg’s Archipelago) being bona-fide meteoric. Elsewhere it’s a series newcomer that almost steals the show. Mark Ruffalo as Bruce Banner IIIrd is a real surprise, his off-kilter and completely on edge genius scientist the powerhouse equal of uber-brain Stark and super-strong Thor in both of their respective specialty areas. Being rather fond of both Banner Mk. I (Eric Bana) and Banner Mk. II (Edward Norton) it feels a tad unfair to compare

the three, but let’s just say that Ruffalo brings something new to the character, who is in turn one of the best things about a rather extraordinary film.

Even to a Whedon sceptic his work here is impressive. Staples of the director can be seen from the off, with the female led prologue, in which the spotlight shines on a new hero, Maria Hill, Agent Of S.H.I.E.L.D. That Whedon felt confident enough in the tale at hand to open up with an extended action sequence told from the perspective not of a familiar character such as Iron Man, Captain America or Thor is a statement that speaks volumes, and sets the tone of the piece nicely. A vignette approach is taken for means of introduction for the rest of the group, ensuring that even the most unfamiliar with the existing films in the series will be able to find their way. Unlike a series like the Harry Potter movies, which are ultimately rendered useless to latecomers beyond film 3 or 4, The Avengers is accessible much in the same way that one of Marvel’s comic-book events are: This is the action packed crossover that one might enjoy enough to seek out the rest, should that be their standing upon entrance. Obviously those familiar with the whole Marvel oeuvre will get more out of this film, but an attachment to its predecessors is not particularly necessary.

**Spoilers for the next paragraph. Skip ahead to remain spoiler-free.**

The presence of Whedon brings with it one of the creative figures more typical trademarks. The death of Agent Coulson is a necessity for the overall plot to move forward: His was the figure that bound this first stage of Marvel’s plan for world domination, his passing is a statement that this period is now over. It is quite liter-



ally the end of era (although we suspect that Coulson may return: after all The Vision does require a brain pattern...). While we're in spoiler territory, let's take a quick look at the film's final reveal, in which a post-credits stinger hints at Thanos being the one that has been pulling the strings on Loki's plan. The direction hinted at by this sudden appearance is one far vaster and wider than anything previously seen in the series and something of a game-changer for the direction of the series (It's almost a shame that they didn't leave Stark in space). The alien race featured in The Avengers, the Chitauri, are the Marvel Ultimate iteration of the Skrulls (the Skrulls name itself is owned by Fox as a part of their Fantastic 4 agreement), so their inclusion too hints at a wider world of potential.

### **End of spoilers.**

What strikes one the most about The Avengers, and its greatest strength, is the manner in which it captures the uncynical, almost earnest nature of the comic-book medium (Granted, the comic-book medium is itself a vast and wide channel, at times very cynical, and completely lacking in earnest, so I guess we're specifically referring to the Golden Age of the form here). This is all the more impressive when one takes in to account that this tone is achieved in the face of a staggering ambition: has a blockbuster of this size ever been made? To draw three very successful, and largely standalone franchises (and one not so successful) together to form one giant-size (pun intended) blockbuster is unheard of. It's an actively intelligent piece of work too, the sort of blockbuster that one might cite when defending this area of the medium too. It has a satisfying plot and rewarding subtext, and heaps of character.

The overarching story doesn't come at the expense of the development or portrayal of the individual characters either. Each one has their own introduction, reintroducing them and placing them within the exact scenario required for the sake of the greater canvas, which is no mean feat considering there are ten major characters in the film. This respect for the source extends to the third act too, where the eponymous Avengers really get to show off their talents. One of the most perfectly choreographed action sequences in recent cinema takes place over an extended period of time, incorporating a perfectly grounded sense of geography, and a well-balanced use of its roster of characters and the finest digitally-aided long-take this side of Alfonso Cuarón's *Children Of Men*. That shot in particular brings together 1001 boyhood hypothesis and ponderings, to extraordinary effect, as does the introduction of the S.H.I.E.L.D Helicarrier. Ultimately, the whole thing is simply immensely satisfying.

The light-hearted, optimistic approach employed by Whedon and co. does occasionally waiver in to darker corners, if not to the extremes offered by the like of Christopher Nolan et al. In addition to a genuine sense of danger felt throughout there's a conspiracy strand too, with the musing on trust lending a political relevancy. Post 9/11 city destroying. In the wake of the films closing city-bound battle there is an emphasis on the manner in which the world of the film is affected unlike some of the films lesser contemporaries. It's appropriate that The Avengers joins *Batman Begins* and Steven Spielberg's *War Of The Worlds* in the pantheon of great post-millennial blockbusters, given the similar relationship towards the events of 9/11 that all three films hold. 9/11 \*actually\* happened in the Marvel Universe, and its effects inspired the path that the Universe took from that point onwards. While

we've covered the relationship between the movies and 9/11 somewhat in-depth before now (thanks to Mike McKenny's landmark series Superheroes), it ought to be reiterated here. The origins of Iron Man were retooled for the post-Afghanistan landscape, while the right-wing has been the punch-line throughout that series. Likewise with Hulk and Thor, in which the liberal arts rule in the face of organised militaria. Captain America is the (purposeful) exception here, with his origins ground in the military, but at the same time purely of them, and object from party influence.

A feeling of exaltation accompanies the closing moments of The Avengers, not only on-screen, but also from the perspective of a spectator of blockbuster cinema. And the best part? This is not an ending. This is just the tip of the iceberg. Perhaps the only thing more exciting than The Avengers is the fact that it feels as though it is really just the beginning, and not the grand finale that one might have expected. And what a world we have left to explore. Within hours of the films closing credits having rolled I downloaded a couple of the books I used to read. Whedon's film struck a genuine chord with the 11-year old that never missed a Saturday trip to Dells comics, and that never thought for even the briefest of moments that the larger than life characters that adorned his walls would one day lose their "larger than" tag and be very much a reality (cinematically speaking of course). I could happily sit through two of these films every Summer for the rest of my life. Roll on Ant-Man, The Defenders, Dr. Strange and The Vision. Bring on the Infinity War, Secret Invasion and The Kree-Skrull War. And hell, while we're at it, lets merge the various on-screen universes. Spidey needs to be a part of this, so does Scott Summers. With The Avengers Marvel have cemented their place as major players within the cinema and we look forward to seeing where they take it next.





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# Where Next For Earth's Mightiest Avengers?



While this article is at heart pure and simple speculation, a couple of plot points from The Avengers do crop up, most notably one major plot point and one big reveal. If you don't want anything spoiling then hold back on this until you've seen the film. So yes, spoilers for The Avengers!





**Thanos** – The appearance of the Cosmic Universe’s favourite titan opens up the Marvel Cinematic Universe considerably. While Thor may have already done that to some extent, by focussing upon a figure like Thanos the direction taken will be considerably different.

The creatively most satisfying narrative structure would be for one to see Thanos working behind the scenes of each of the upcoming individual films, and for him to be the big bad in an eventual Avengers sequel. Saying that, there’s just as much of a chance that the character will simply be used as the villain in Thor 2. We hope not: the ambition and scale suggested by his very appearance alone is little short of a game-changer for the Marvel Cinematic Universe.

**Agent Coulson** - Coulson is dead. While from a poetic standpoint the characters demise was almost necessary to close the book on the first chapter of the MCU, wouldnt it be nice to see newest best

pals Tony Stark and Bruce Banner work together to solve this little problem (Hey, this is the comic-book world we’re talking about). Completely hypothesising here, but The Vision hasn’t yet made an appearance (pun intended), and he kinda needs a “brainwave” for a personality...

**Banner** – Speaking of which, what is to be of Bruce B? The final moments of the film threw something of a curveball, in that he and Stark had bonded and drove off in to the sunset together. Does this mean that Iron Man 3 will feature the pair? Here’s hoping. Sadly though, we’d imagine that having a Hulk on your payroll automatically adds another \$10million to your budget, so we suspect any such appearance will be limited. It ought to also go without saying that we would love to see Harry Dean Stanton appear in any and all future Hulk movies.

**Thor** – It was quickly established how Thor could, if necessary, get back to Earth, in spite of the destruction of the Bifröst at the end of his standalone movie. His relationship with Earth was also clarified (as protector). So where does he go next? Thor 2 is due to start filming in the next few months, and as we’ve hypothesised above Thanos might be the villain (we hope not though). The return of Loki to Asgard is interesting too: we’re fairly sure that its been confirmed that Loki isn’t the main villain in the next Thor film, but as anyone knows his presence alone is enough to expect chaos. We wouldn’t bet against a story which revolves around a post-Avengers Chitauri seeking revenge against Loki (this was promised in The Avengers after all...), bringing a battle between Gods and Aliens to the fore.



**Captain America** – We suspect that the emphasis on that one particular bank-teller saved by Rogers during the films closing battle was more than a throw-away moment. The same girl appeared in the media montage at the end of the film too, so we're just going to throw this out there: the woman in question is Sharon Carter, niece of Steve's World War 2-era love interest Peggy, and future object of his affections herself. Rogers' relationship with women is a long (temporally at least) and complicated tale, and we'd love to see it form the backbone of Captain America's exploration of the modern world in the next standalone Cap film.

**S.H.I.E.L.D** – A Mission:Impossible-esque spin off featuring the likes of Nick Fury, Maria Hill, Hawkeye and Black Widow could be fantastic. A little un-Super perhaps for the MCU, but it could be a refreshing alternative. We got a hint of the wider S.H.I.E.L.D world in Black Widow's introductory vignette in The Avengers, in which the character was seen taking down Georgi Luchkov, who's appearance was all the more remarkable thanks to him being played by Polish filmmaker Jerzy Skolimowski!

**Events** – While the presence of the Skrull (in their Chitauri Ultimate iteration due to rights issues) suggests major events like the Kree Skrull War or Secret Invasion are a likely possibility for the future. One might presume that Civil War, given its stature within the mainstream would also be a likely future event. There would have to be pretty significant changes in character for that particular story to fall in to place (The roles of Captain America and Iron Man seem pretty much reversed from how they were prior to in the comic-book version of the event for a start). Civil War is arguably the biggest and best known event in the contemporary comic-book universe, and we fully expect it to happen at some point (espe-

cially given the emphasis on the effects of the Avengers on the people and the world around them in the closing moments of this film). Besides, if the woods scene in The Avengers is but a hint of things to come in a superhero on superhero showdown then we think it'll be something worth getting excited for. with that in mind though, the scale of the world needs to be much bigger (in terms of the number of superheroes involved).

As we said in our review of The Avengers, one of our favourite aspects of the film was that it didn't feel like an ending, which is what many had suspected. The manner in which the world has expanded, without force and naturally, is perhaps its greatest strength. We look forward to seeing what comes next.



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# Credits

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