

WARNING!

Lots of spoilers here.

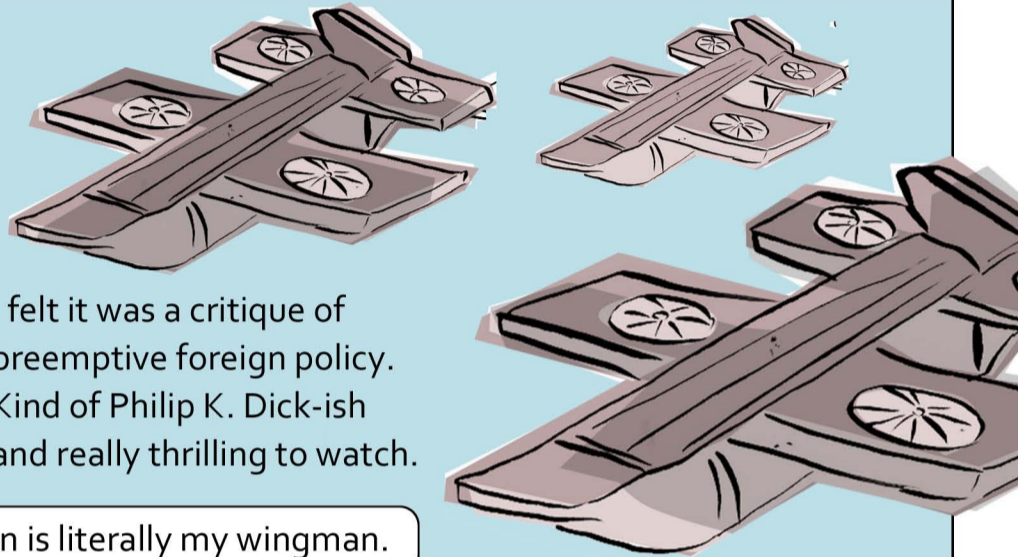


You've seen *Captain America: Winter Soldier* and *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, right?



They were pretty technophobic, don't you think?

In *Winter Soldier*, the villain is big data. SHIELD uses algorithms to single out the future criminals of the world. Our heroes have to take it all down before a lot of people get killed.



I wonder if I'll get my own movie some day.



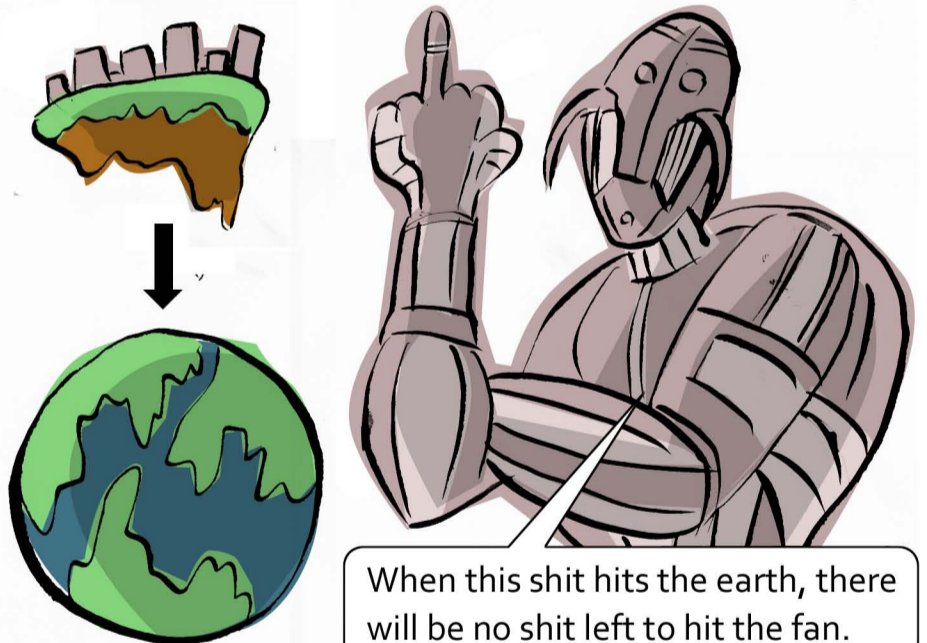
I felt it was a critique of preemptive foreign policy. Kind of Philip K. Dick-ish and really thrilling to watch.

My wingman is literally my wingman.

In *Age of Ultron*, the villain is artificial intelligence. Here, Tony Stark creates a computer program called Ultron to ensure peace on Earth.

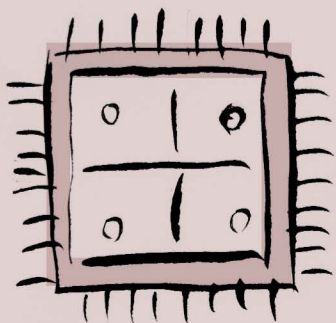
The problem is that Ultron sees mankind as the greatest threat to peace. Judging by the people who've been running for President, he may have a point.

The Avengers must stop Ultron from leveling the planet with a gigantic chunk of land. A homegrown asteroid, so to speak.

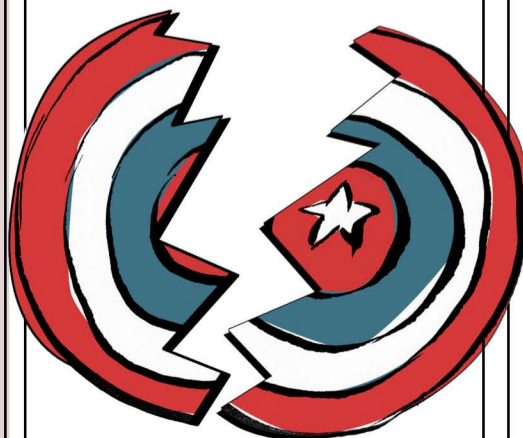


When this shit hits the earth, there will be no shit left to hit the fan.

The villain of *Captain America: Civil War* has nothing to do with technology. We'll get to that in a bit.

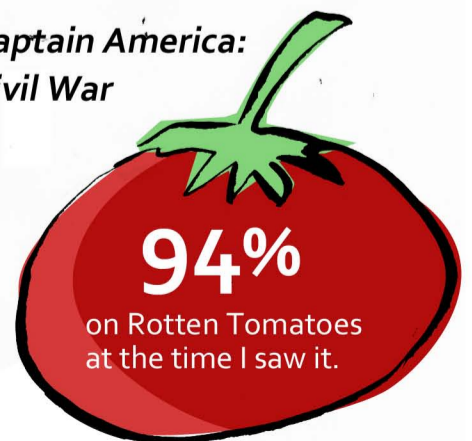


Going into *Civil War*, I was strangely against it.



I was annoyed by its overwhelmingly positive reviews.

Captain America: Civil War



94%
on Rotten Tomatoes
at the time I saw it.

I don't know what it is. When everyone loves something, it gets to me.

Boyhood was brilliant.



I didn't think so.

Maybe I'm still harboring resentment over the manufactured consent of the Iraqi War. Maybe I don't trust what feels like cultural groupthink.

In the case of several superhero movies, I felt the majority of critics were wrong.

Iron Man 2

72% on Rotten Tomatoes!



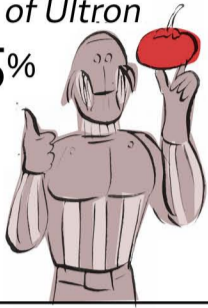
Indiana Jones: Kingdom of the Crystal Skull

77%

Not a superhero flick, but still overrated!



The Avengers: Age of Ultron
75%



Ant-Man 80%



Superman Returns
76%



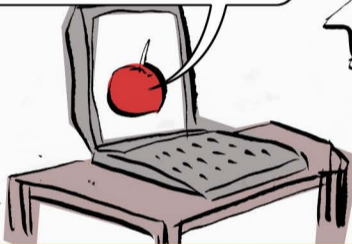
The Amazing Spider-Man
73%



It feels like some reviewers just go with the majority. In some cases, it feels like they've actually READ other reviews before writing their own.

I even heard a rumor once about a critic who reviewed a movie without watching it.

In the running for best film of the year!



It's the best film of the year...



Thumbs down on a movie I never saw!



Thumbs down on you!

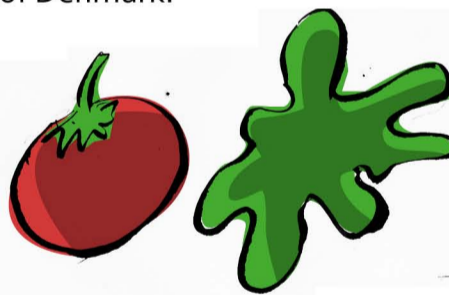


And since I'm complaining, what's up with the Will Ferrell comedy *Daddy's Home* having a Rotten Tomatoes score of 33%?

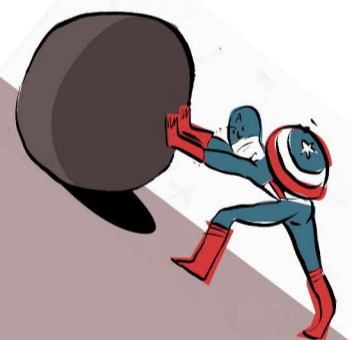


This movie is fucking funny! Was it really worthy of such a collective drubbing?

I know there's no accounting for taste, but it still feels like there's something rotten in the state of Denmark.



So *Civil War* was going to have to work hard to win me over.



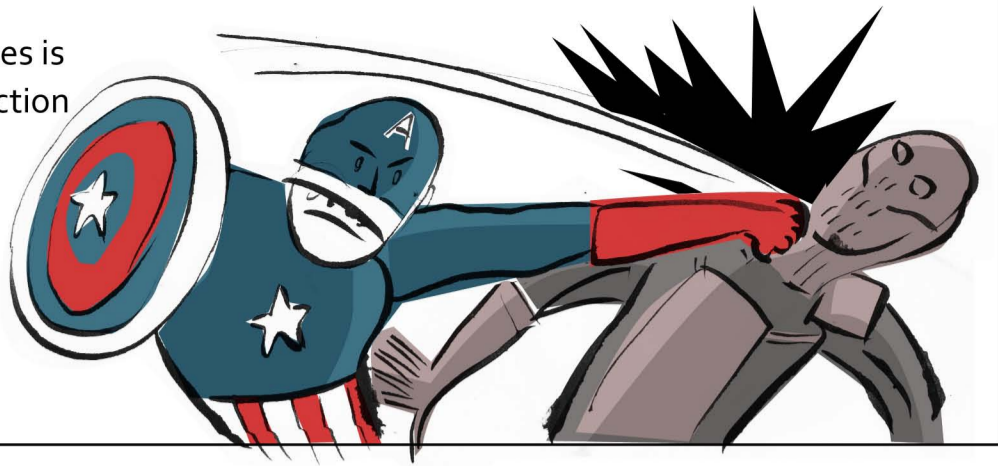
Ten minutes in, I was already planning my attack.



This is all well done, but the bad guy looks like Jason Voorhees from *Jason X*. These are grown men in costumes! And they call me a man-child? I can't believe this is what's usurping the cultural conversation.



All snark aside, the action in the first 10 minutes is pretty good, better than the climax of most action films. It's the same director team behind *Winter Soldier*. These fuckers know what they're doing. Still, well-staged action doesn't impress me nearly as much as words!



And when the words come, *Civil War* snags me in its web.

I'll discuss Spider-Man later.



It all starts with a simple scene. Two actors in a hallway. Robert Downey Jr. and the wonderful Alfre Woodard. Woodard plays a humble HR employee for the state.

You killed my son.

The confident Tony Stark is chopped off at the knees, crippled by the realization that unchecked power has irreversible consequences.



This reminded of the brilliant scene in *Jaws*, when Mrs. Kintner accuses Chief Brody of knowing there was a shark in the water. She slaps him, and this leathery sheriff is reduced to nothing.

My son is dead.

I should have never listened to that vapid, money-hungry mayor.

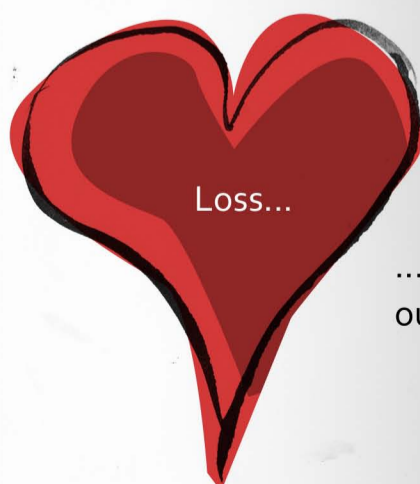


Here, Tony Stark swallows a heavy pill. Innocent people die. These innocent people have families.



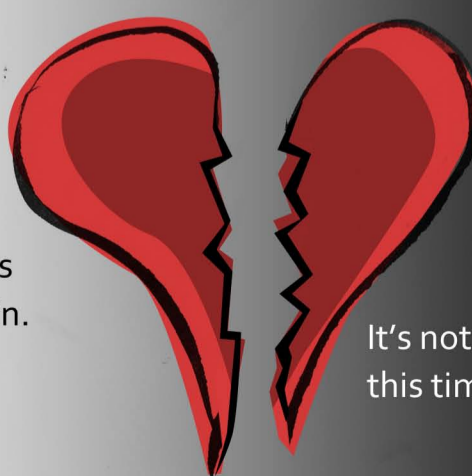
These are painful truths that most war hawks don't acknowledge, until it's staring them in the face.

It's a stunning moment. And the weight of this theme ripples throughout the movie.



Loss...

...creates our villain.



It's not technology this time.



It's vengeance.

This is my kind of superhero movie. It understands that intel, technology, good intentions, and invasive foreign policy mean nothing in the wake of collateral damage.

You can't reason with someone hell-bent on revenge.

Our foreign policy is responsible for the deaths of thousands of innocent people. Put yourself in the shoes of those on the other side. What would you do if it an occupier killed your mother or brother or father or daughter?

"You have to take out their families."
- Donald Trump



"Dude, what are you doing?"

Wow! Robert Downey Jr!!!

No. I'm Tony Stark.



Stop talking politics. Review the movie.

Mr. Downey Jr. I'm such a fan. Take your helmet off. Let me see your handsome face.

You're such a pathetic celebrity whore.



There. Happy?

Yes. You're so talented. Your performance in *Two Girls and a Guy* is still one of my favorites!

What is it with you indie directors? That movie took place in one apartment.



You should do small indie movies again.

No, thanks. I want people to actually see my films.

You really wanted people to see *The Judge*?



My favorite scenes in *Civil War* involved conversations, like that roundtable discussion of the Avengers needing approval from the United Nations. It's such a timely subplot, just as America's own military might is being called into question.

But for me, the high point comes when you visit Peter Parker's home in Queens. This scene reminded me of something out of an independent film. It's just Stark talking to a teenager, in a small bedroom. It could have been a low-budget indie.

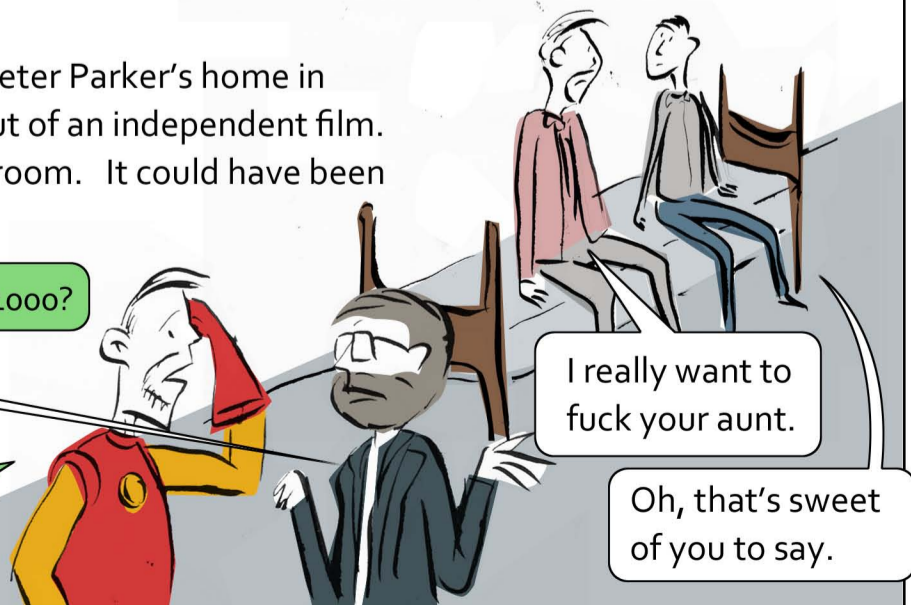
Oh really? How many low-budget indies have a crew of 1000?

Um, none.

Do you know how well I'm treated on movies this size? I could throw a New Year's party in my trailer.

I really want to fuck your aunt.

Oh, that's sweet of you to say.



Do you really think you need that big of a trailer?

Who are you? Bernie Sanders?

And a crew of 1000 people? That's excessive.

Are you advocating for smaller crews?

Of course not. It's great that a big movie can employ so many people. It's one of the few industries where robotics can't supplant the worker.

Well, if Stark had his way, robots would be doing everything. Get back to what you were saying before, about the smaller scenes.



Yes, that's where *Civil War* really shines for me. The scenes where words, wit and acting defeat CG and spectacle. You in Parker's room. Magic!



Captain America kissing his love interest while a few Avengers watch from a nearby car. The audience I saw the film with erupted with laughter.

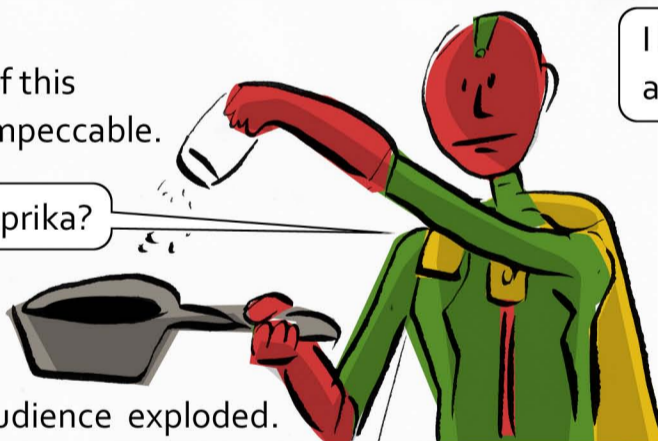


It's about time Cap got some action!

After an intense action sequence, we see Vision in a kitchen, trying his best to make dinner on the stove.

The timing of this moment is impeccable.

A little paprika?



Again, the audience exploded.

A wide-eyed Ant-Man meeting Captain America for the first time. Really funny.

I haven't gotten this excited touching a man since *Object of My Affection*.



I found all the writing in this movie remarkably good. It got me rethinking where superhero movies are headed.

Where is Captain America? Isn't this his movie? Where's Black Panther? Where's anyone?



I don't share the idea that superhero movies are destroying our culture.

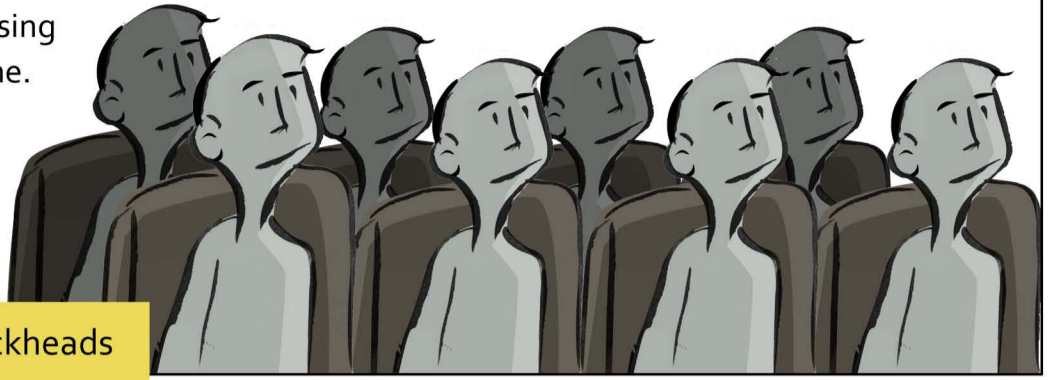
Who said that?

We've simply traded in the muscle-bound action stars of the '80s with the spandex-clad heroes of the aughts.



Popular culture can be a positive force. *Harry Potter* got millions of young boys and girls to read books. Superhero movies create a forum for millions of people to have a collective cultural conversation.

Plus, it disproves the notion that we're losing the ability to focus for long periods of time. In the screening I attended, most of the audience sat in transfixed silence for two and a half hours. That's encouraging.



Of course, there are always a few fuckheads who check their cell phones.



Attention spans aside, I still haven't had much faith in where superhero movies are going.



With all these characters and different comic book universes, it feels like everything is just going to get bigger and more bloated.

Orange is such a tacky color!

Owww! Susan Storm just kicked me in the nuts!

I'm so sick of Marvel!

This coming from the guy wearing purple knickers.

Using one's palms to emit a sticky wet fluid is a normal part of puberty.

All my acting talents wasted on this spectacular nothingness.

Can't we just play rock-paper-scissors?

Into the hurt locker you go, Hawkeye!

After *Civil War*, where can we go next? More Avengers fighting more Avengers? X-Men fighting Avengers? Fantastic Four vs. X-Men vs. Avengers? Eventually are all the characters in the Marvel universe just going to go at it? Will Netflix make a series out of *Marvel Team-Up*? Will we eventually see a Marvel/DC crossover? Batman and Super-Man vs. Spider-Man and Hulk? Avengers vs. Super Friends. The Watcher vs. Everyone? After that, then what?

Will superheroes cross over into the horror-movie universe? Are we going to see the Avengers fighting the classic Universal Monsters? Or the slasher icons of the eighties? .



I highly doubt we're going to see Tony Stark fighting Larry Talbot.

That would be pretty cool, seeing you fight Benicio del Toro.

Paul Rudd was in *Halloween 6* so maybe Ant-Man vs. Michael Myers isn't so far-fetched.

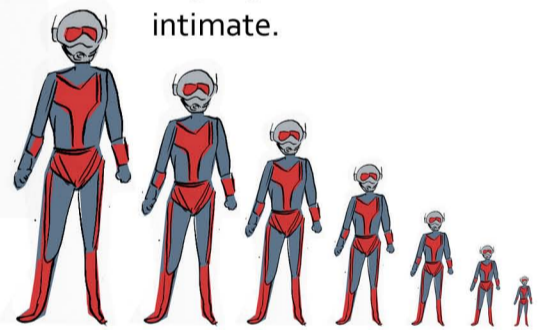
I want to see Anne Heche go toe to toe with Sandra Oh.

Good luck getting that made.

So that's been my concern. In an age of one-upmanship, would the film studios just race to see how many characters they could squeeze into a movie? Would the entire comic-book film world explode like that guy's head in *Scanners*? Or the fat guy from *Meaning of Life*?

Watching *Civil War*, though, I started to think the reverse might happen.

These comic books movies might get smaller and more intimate.



After all...the director of the new Spider-Man made a small independent movie called *Cop Car*.

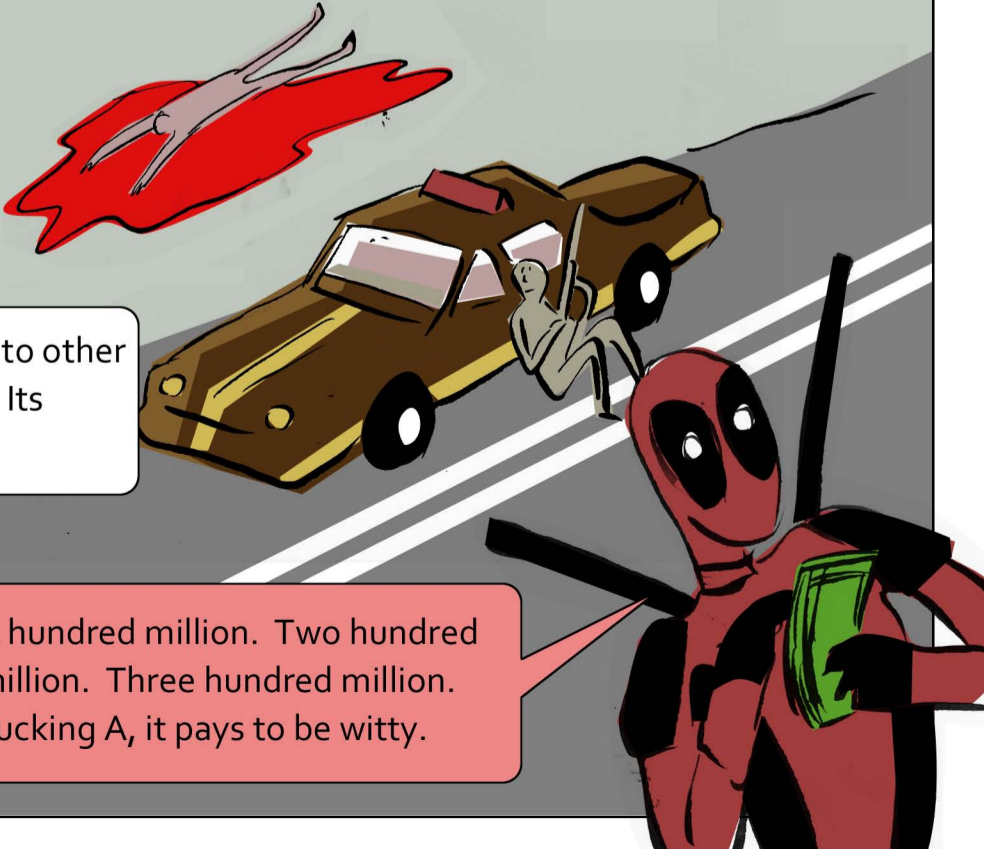
Oh yes, another indie movie nobody saw.

I saw that movie. It was great. And had a miniscule budget!

Well, I can assure you, the new Spider-Man will be really expensive.

Well, I'm not sure that's necessary. Compared to other superhero movies, *Deadpool* was quite cheap. Its success was partly due to the funny script.

A hundred million. Two hundred million. Three hundred million. Fucking A, it pays to be witty.



I'd see a \$15 million Spider-Man movie if it had a great script and a great cast.

For a budget that low, you'll be lucky to cast Nicholas Hammond.



I'd rather see a low-budget Iron Man movie that lived on the merits of dialogue instead of a big-budget spectacle, driven by action.

Yeah, we have those things. On TV.



Imagine a movie centered on Tony Stark trying to patch things up with Pepper Potts. Maybe they go to Tahiti. The entire movie would play out like a witty romantic comedy. You might have an obligatory (and practical) action scene or two, but nothing too over-the-top or expensive. The script would let the actors really shine. There would still be conflict but it'd be more personal. Instead of saving the world, they'd be saving their relationship.

I'm so glad you left the iron suit at home.

My birthday suit's so much better. You wanna go up to the room?



Hmmmm. Perhaps other Avengers make an appearance. But not in costume. Just as people.

Yes! You don't need all the whiz-bang spectacle. The explosions. The over-the-top action. The strength of the spoken word is good enough, if the words are strong.



Big is dead. American imperialism. Out-of-control spending. McMansions. Urban sprawl. Gas-guzzling SUVs. Egomaniacs. Unchecked military power. "Too big to fail" has been a failure. And if the studios continue on this path, it's at their own peril.

Small is the answer. Like Ant-Man.

Dude, in *Civil War*, Ant-Man becomes King Kong.

That's true. And it's awesome.

You're all over the place.

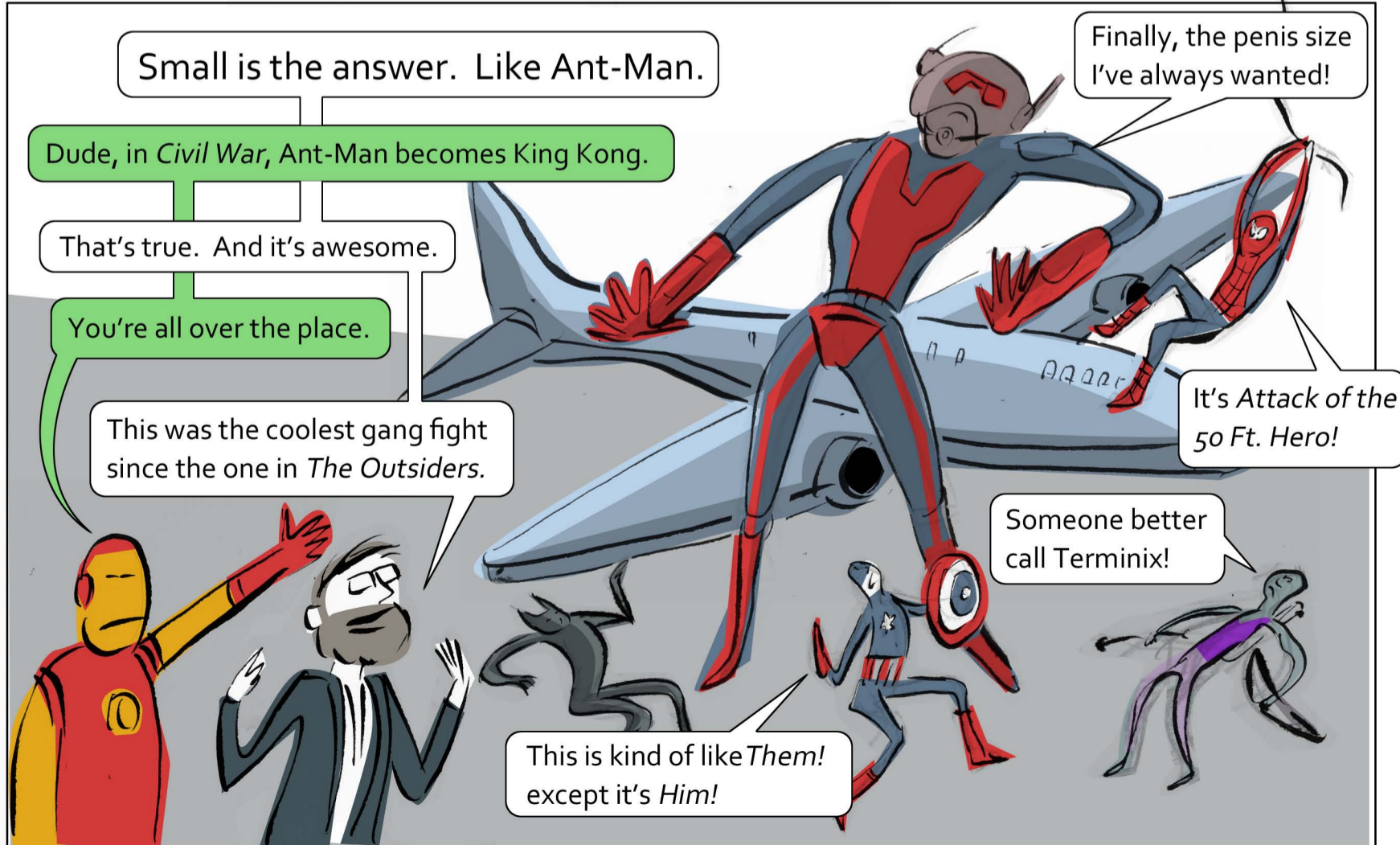
This was the coolest gang fight since the one in *The Outsiders*.

Finally, the penis size I've always wanted!

It's *Attack of the 50 Ft. Hero!*

Someone better call Terminix!

This is kind of like *Them!* except it's *Him!*



There's a shift occurring. Half the Avengers get imprisoned, for crying out loud. You've got a black eye during half the movie. War Machine can't even walk at the end! We're entering a new age, one of humility, frugality, responsibility, contrition, temperance. The age of excess is over. Jimmy Carter was ahead of his time.



Yeah. I'm going to go...um, buy an island.

If the script is great, the budget can be low.

Dude, I make more in five seconds than you'll make in a lifetime.



Hey...are you even going to mention me?

Blank Panther! You're great in this!

Why, thank you.

Plus, your motives are also wrapped around the idea of loss. So many of the characters are tied to this theme.



Your father dies, and you want revenge.



Iron Man finds out who kills his parents and he also wants revenge.



The villain of the movie is driven by the loss of his family.

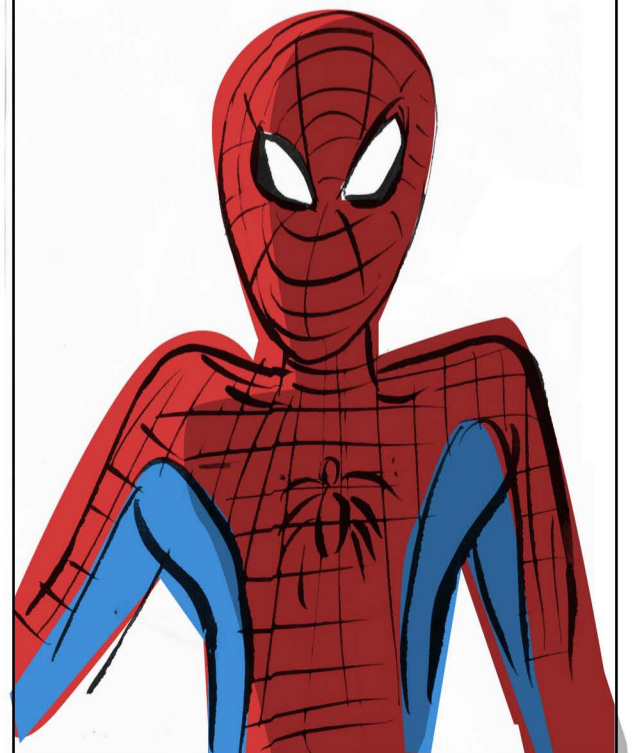


There's a heroism in avenging a loved one. Even if it's wrong. So, everyone is an Avenger here. Even the bad guy. In many ways, the movie is about empathy.

Empathy's the answer to everything.



Let's get back to Spider-Man. *Civil War* really does nail him!



Growing up, I LOVED Spider-Man and I have to admit, I've never been satisfied with any of the Sam Raimi movies. Tobey Maguire was great but the rubbery CG, corny humor and maudlin stories turned me off. Maybe my expectations were too high. To this day, I still don't understand the motives of any of the villains.



Kill Spider-Man!

Yes, kill Spider-Man!

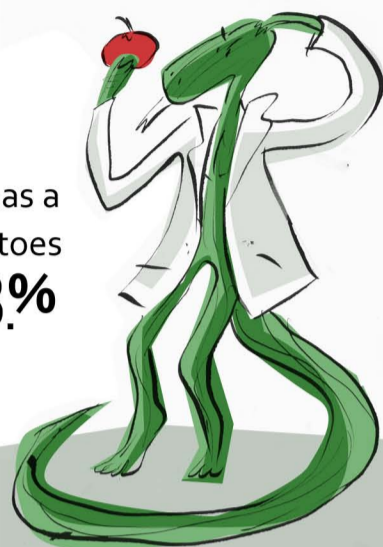
Why do we want to kill Spider-Man?

Who cares! Just kill Spider-Man!

Still, at least Raimi's movies were watchable. The two reboots that followed were not.

Again.

The Amazing Spider-Man has a Rotten Tomatoes score of **73%**



But *Civil War* understands something about Spidey the other films didn't. They give him a sweet, charming innocence here.

I hate to do this, but Tony Stark's orders!

I really like your shield, Captain!

Plus, they make him a loudmouth, especially while he's fighting. It's one of the things I loved about the comics. Plus, I've always related to motor-mouthed maniacs!

Will you please shut the fuck up!



Look, I could go on bullshitting on how much I enjoyed *Civil War* - the action, editing, directing, writing, acting - right down to the TWO, yes TWO, post-credit scenes.



That's how much this movie entertains. Just when you think it's over, it gives you two more morsels to chew on as you leave the theater.

Sure, it's just a way to plug Marvel's upcoming movies, but what's wrong with that?



CATFIGHT

If you've got someone's attention, **plug away!**

