

Avengers: Infinity War – An accumulation, or continuation?

Pim Razenberg on whether Avengers: Infinity War will be an accumulation of the Marvel Cinematic Universe, or a continuation...

We're well into 2015 and **Avengers: Age of Ultron** is firmly knocking on our doors. The superhero ensemble movie will pick up the threads from Marvel Studios' previous Phase

Two instalments, and, looking at the studio's Phase Three movie slate, will shuttle its main characters into a host of new adventures.



The titles announced for Phase Three in the ever-growing Marvel Cinematic Universe give us strong hints of what's to come. **Captain America: The Winter Soldier** actor Anthony Mackie recently referred to **Captain America: Civil War** as "Avengers 3.8", referring to the fact that many of the Cinematic Universe's characters will return to the big screen for the Phase Three opening movie. Furthermore, Tony Stark's inclusion in **Civil War** and the progressive integration of new characters such as **Black Panther** and **Spider-Man** over the course of several films seem to strengthen the Marvel Cinematic Universe's overall sense of

coherence: during Phase Three there might be a lot less second guessing over the fate of "other Avengers" while Marvel's solo movies play out.

Even more so than in Phase Two, each individual movie in Phase Three seems to serve as both a continuation of Marvel's solo franchises as well as a building block towards some greater goal. Though Kevin Feige stated to have mapped out the Marvel Cinematic Universe until 2028, as of now the two-part **Avengers: Infinity War** seems to be the great epic event the studio is steering itself towards.

However, while the Marvel Cinematic Universe continues to be explored and expanded, there are certain pressing issues at hand that make us question the status of *Avengers: Infinity War* within the overall plot of *The Avengers*

franchise. The contracts of the actors portraying the “original” 2012 Avengers are soon to expire and speculation already arose over the absence of these key characters in the first part of *Infinity War*.



Whether these rumours are true or false is at this point irrelevant. The real question at the base of these issues is: will *Avengers: Infinity War* be an *accumulation* or a *continuation* of the Marvel Cinematic Universe as we know it?

In the original comic books *The Avengers* commonly operated with a rotating schedule of superheroes, and by the time *Infinity War* comes around many new characters will be in place ready to take over from characters such as *Iron Man*, *Captain America* and *Thor*. But what is commonplace within the world of comic books doesn't necessarily translate well into a multi-billion dollar movie franchise. Not all fans of *The Avengers* are comic book readers, let

alone comic book fanatics. Strip the audience of these loyalists and how many people will there be left that would gladly accept – or even understand – why the “new Avengers movie” doesn't feature the characters they came to know as “the Avengers”?

Marvel Studios will have a difficult decision to make concerning the movie's creative direction. Given that *Avengers: Infinity War* is said to wrap up Marvel's eleven-year story arc, will the movie truly be the epic accumulation of the Marvel Cinematic Universe, or will the movie be more of a continuation of the franchise, leading old *and* new characters and storylines into Phase Four?



If the studio opts for *accumulation*, **Infinity War** will most likely feature many of the Cinematic Universe's pre-existing superheroes, ranging from the original Avengers to new additions such as **Doctor Strange**, **Ant-Man**, the **Inhumans** or **Black Panther**. Only time will tell how (and whether) Marvel's **Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.**, **Daredevil** and the **Defenders** come into play, and whether the **Guardians of the Galaxy** will unite with Earth's Mightiest Heroes to square off against the Mad Titan, Thanos. **Infinity War** could end the saga of the Cinematic Universe's current Avenger-team and lead the franchise into a new era, focusing on new characters. Contracts end, characters die; yet the world keeps on spinning. Producing **Infinity War** as an epic accumulation of the Marvel Cinematic Universe, hinting at and influencing many of its aspects, might be *the* definitive prove that Marvel truly succeeded in pulling of the creation of a comic book-style shared movie Universe.

It is questionable, however, where such a movie would leave the Marvel Cinematic Universe as a whole, entering Phase Four. If everything leads up to **Infinity War**, and after **Infinity War** Phase Four will largely focus on the studio's new characters and storylines, will there be as much franchise loyalty then as there is now? Drawing

up **Infinity War** as the conclusion to the Cinematic Universe's overall story arcs and continuing the franchise in such a fashion could feel much like making a sequel to **The Matrix**-trilogy, based on its surviving characters.

If Marvel Studios instead opts to produce **Infinity War** as a *continuation* of the Cinematic Universe, making it a (large) stepping stone between its first three phases and the fourth, rather than a cumulative conclusion to it all, the two part-epic will leave a stronger sense of "there's more to come" on its audience. Such a movie would, however, require a smaller scale movie, handpicking its main characters from the Cinematic Universe's large batch of heroes much like **Civil War** is doing, while saving other characters as a second front to (co-)headline Phase Four. Yet while **Civil War's** mix-and-match approach might be a wise choice to model **Infinity War** after, it might not prove to be enough to warrant the long anticipated two part endgame Marvel Studios is promising its audiences; after all, Kevin Feige himself already stated that the studio has been building up towards **Infinity War** since the very beginning of their Cinematic Universe, calling the two-part movie a "culmination of everything that has come before".



Juggling Marvel Studios ever-growing slate of heroes within the Cinematic Universe might prove to be very difficult to pull off over time. No matter which approach the studio decides to take, **Infinity War** will most likely leave the Cinematic Universe with a discrepancy between the old and the new. There's no guarantee Phase Three's new heroes will become fan favourite characters strong enough to eventually replace the likes of Robert Downey, Jr., Chris Evans and Chris Hemsworth and there are no guarantees today's Earth Mightiest Heroes will be willing to extend their contracts beyond **Infinity War**.

Personally, I would feel a bit cheated if the **Infinity War** storyline, which has been set up

over the course of over a dozen films, doesn't even feature the characters from that particular slate of films. After all, what's the point of having all the "original" Avengers encounter the infinity stones if they won't be around to protect them when the storm hits? Based on Marvel Studios' track record, however, I believe that this won't be the case. Hopefully the studio will be able to find the right balance between the old and the new for **Avengers: Infinity War**, leaving Phase Four to become an accumulation in itself of all that was good about the Universe they have created.

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