

What movie has provoked thought and incited your emotions?

What movie bored you?

What is your favorite genre?

What are a few of your favorite movies?

Are you interested in low-brow movies?

What movie have you seen recently that disappointed you?

What criteria do you use in deciding to see a movie in the theater?

Do you prefer reading reviews, word-of-mouth recommendations, or trailers when choosing to see a movie in the theater?

Do you prefer watching movies at home or in the theater?

What movie are you looking forward to seeing?

One of the weapons Marvel used in its climb to comic-book dominance was a willingness to invent new characters at a dizzying speed. There are so many Marvel universes, indeed, that some superheroes do not even exist in one another's worlds, preventing gridlock. The Avengers however do share the same time and space continuum, although in recent years, they've been treated in separate, single-superhero movies. One assumes the idle Avengers follow the exploits of the employed ones on the news.

"The Avengers," much awaited by Marvel comics fans, assembles all of the Avengers in one film: Iron Man, Captain America, Thor, the Hulk, the Black Widow and Hawkeye. This is like an all-star game, or the chef's sampling menu at a fancy restaurant. What always strikes me is how different their superpowers are. Iron Man (Robert Downey) is just an ordinary guy until he's wearing his super-suit. Thor (Chris Hemsworth) swings a mighty hammer. Hawkeye (Jeremy Renner) wields a bow with arrows so powerful they can bring down alien spacecraft. The Hulk (Mark Ruffalo) is a mild-mannered guy until he gets angry, and then he expands into a leaping, bounding green muscle man who can rip apart pretty much anything. Captain America (Chris Evans) has a powerful and versatile shield. Then there's Natasha (Scarlett Johansson), aka the Black Widow. After seeing the film, I discussed her with movie critics from Brazil and India, and we were unable to come up with a satisfactory explanation for her superpowers; it seems she is merely a martial artist with good aim with weapons. We decided maybe she and Hawkeye aren't technically superheroes, but just hang out in the same crowd.

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When I see these six together, I can't help thinking of the champions at the Westminster Dog Show. You have breeds that seem completely different from one another (Labradors, poodles, boxers, Dalmatians), and yet they're all champions.

The reason they're brought together in "The Avengers" is that the Earth is under threat by the smirking Loki (Tom Hiddleston), Thor's adopted brother, who controls the Tesseract, a pulsing cube of energy that opens a gateway to the universe; through it, he plans to attack Earth with his fleet of reptile-looking monster-machines. It goes completely unexplained where Loki now resides, how these dragon-machines are manufactured, and so on. Both Loki and Thor are obscurely related to the gods of Norse mythology, as we know from last year's "Thor," but let's not drift into theology.

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Nick Fury (Samuel L. Jackson) sends out a call to the Avengers to team up and meet this threat. He runs SHIELD, the Strategic Homeland Intervention, Enforcement and Logistics Division, which is all I know about it. He's headquartered on a gigantic aircraft carrier that's also a hovercraft and can become invisible. By bringing the Avengers together, he of course reopens ancient rivalries (i.e. my hammer can beat your shield), until they learn the benefits of Teamwork, which is discussed in speeches of noble banality. So you see this is sort of an educational film, teaching the Avengers to do what was so highly valued on my first-grade report card: the concept of Working Well With Others.

These films are all more or less similar, and "The Avengers" gives us much, much more of the same. There must be a threat. The heroes must be enlisted. The villain must be dramatized. Some personality defects are probed. And then the last hour or so consists of special effects in which large mechanical objects engage in combat that results in deafening crashes and explosions and great balls of fire.

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Much of this battle takes place in midtown Manhattan, where the neatest sequences involve Loki's ginormous slithering, undulating snake-lizard-dragon machine, which seems almost to have a mind of its own and is backed up by countless snakelings. At one point, an Avenger flies into the mouth of this leviathan and penetrates its entire length, emerging at the business end. You won't see that in "The Human Centipede."

"Comic-Con nerds will have multiple orgasms," predicts critic David Edelstein in *New York* magazine, confirming something I had vaguely suspected about them. If he is correct, it's time for desperately needed movies to re-educate nerds in the joys of sex. "The Avengers" is done well by Joss Whedon, with style and energy. It provides its fans with exactly what they desire. Whether it is exactly what they deserve is arguable.

Does the Marvel Universe interest you? Are you interested in the superhero genre? Do you think these stories are banal?

Do you have a favorite Marvel character? What attracts them to you?

What is your opinion of the film critic comparing these characters to dogs? Do you think he is being deliberately dismissive?

Do you care that the movie doesn't explain Loki's whereabouts or how the dragon-machines are manufactured?

Have superhero films taught you anything?

Do you agree that these films are more or less similar?

Do you think these films rely too much on special effects?

What do you desire from a (superhero) movie?

Are superhero films primarily for nerds? Do you think it is strange that there is only one female character?

Loki is a wily trickster god of Norse mythology. He is playful, malicious, helpful, irreverent, and nihilistic. His name might mean "knot" or "tangle".

At 3:08 there is a rhetorical question. What is it? When have you asked one?

What is the meaning of the analogy at 7:03?

What is the threat at 13:48? Has someone ever threatened you? Have you ever threatened anyone?

What does trust someone as far as you can throw them mean?
15:09

a hell of a 16:36

the easy way 18:56 Do you usually learn things the hard way or the easy?

be out of line 19:23

When has it been up to you? 19:50 Do you prefer to work alone or with others?

to have one's fill 21:36 I can't get my fill of

I'm afraid 24:30

When have experienced a snafu? 25:15

be scrapped 26:26 When have you had to scrap a meeting?

What do you think of Loki's monologue? 40:00 to 40:50

be fond of 43:35 What are you not overly fond of?

What winds you up? 58:28

What do you find repulsive? 1:02.20

be in the red/black 1:05 Who are you indebted to?

grudge 1:08.10 Do you hold a grudge?

let off steam 11:10 What is a positive way to let off steam?

fall for 1:23

be out of one's league 1:35.40

piss off 1:40.30 What do you do when someone pisses you off?

be like shooting fish in a barrel 1:47.50

What are Loki's grievances?

What character is the most/least likeable? What are their character flaws and virtues?

What are some of the movie's themes?

What makes for a successful team? Have you ever been part of one? Why were you chosen to join? What was your contribution?

Do you want to see more superhero movies?