

# A Marvellous Addendum: Ethics of Collateral Damage in the Superheroes of the Marvel Cinematic Universe

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The Britannica Dictionary defines collateral damage as “forms of damage including deaths and injuries that are a result of the fighting in a war but happen to people who are not in the military” (Britannica.com). A supplanted understanding of the term extends to all other forms of collision, beyond the military. However, it does not take long to understand that such damages would be paramount in any form of physical combat, especially one involving people (or armies) with superpowers. In the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU), initiated by the film *Iron Man* (2008), these battles occur in almost all the films that have been released in the last fourteen years, though in different intensities and proportions. It comes as no surprise that in such battles, there would be a lot of collateral damage, both to people and to property. The premise of *Captain America: Civil War* (2016) rests on this aspect as well. Though *Civil War* does not directly mention collateral damage, one can trace back the possibilities of a city full of people almost dying in Sokovia in *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015). Those people, innocent as they were, were about to die because of a mistake made by the ‘billionaire, playboy, philanthropist, genius’ Tony Stark (*Avengers*).

## The Beginnings of Collateral Damage

In *Iron Man*, Obadiah Stein, Tony’s colleague, orders a hit on Tony at the beginning of the film, which in turn leads the latter to build an armour of iron, welded together in a cave, powered by a miniaturised arc reactor. In one way, one could argue that the first superhero in the modern-day MCU (that is, not taking into consideration the X-Men movies or *The Incredible Hulk*, all of which came before *Iron Man*) was created as collateral damage. The creation of a superhero does not qualify as damage, but given the amount of collateral damage he would dole out in the next eleven years in the MCU, one could argue that when he went from being Tony Stark to Iron Man, that was, indeed, damage. In the book, *Avengers Assemble: Critical Perspectives on the Marvel Cinematic Universe*, the author writes about the Iron Man suit,

The technologically advanced Iron Man suit also promulgates another myth about the pre-eminence of American warfare in the twenty-first century, that its weapons technology is able to target enemies and kill efficiently and morally without any collateral damage, and that those it kills are only ever ‘the bad guys’ who unequivocally deserve it. This, of course, is a problematic abstention from reality achieved only by erasing the painful truth of the thousands of civilians killed and wounded as the result of American military operations in the ‘War on Terror’ era. (McSweeney 2018: 54)

McSweeney’s point is further substantiated by the stance that the MCU has towards collateral damage in almost all the films, with the minor exceptions of *Age of Ultron* and *Civil War*. In *Eternals*, the audience sits back and watches the Eternals fight the Deviants, causing irreplaceable loss to the lives and property of all those who were in and around those fights, What losses they bore was never mentioned in the film, just like no mention was made of all the people who died along with King T’Chaka when the explosion happened in *Civil War*. It falls out of line with the eponymous character of the film, Captain America, for whom ethics and morality have always been held in the highest of regards.

Although, chronologically Steve Rogers (Captain America) was born as a superhero much before Stark (or anyone else in the MCU), the film *Captain America: The First Avenger* was released in 2011, three years after the release of *Iron Man*. This background sets the stage for the *Avengers* movie, where, for the first time, substantial damage to public property is shown on camera. Despite the apparent anachronism in their timelines, both of these characters have had significant instances of collateral damage in their lives (discussed later in this paper) at around the same time, namely in the first *Avengers* film. Therefore, collateral damage occurs in the lives of the Avengers and the passersby at the same time, irrespective of their introduction to the MCU.

In *Avengers*, Loki, the apparent antagonist, did not want to cause any physical harm to the people he met at Stuttgart. Even when he manipulated Clint Barton (aka Hawkeye) and Dr Selvig, he did not hurt them physically. His larger plan involved destruction and death, but that was his aim. Unlike the Avengers, he explicitly sought to cause damage to the people of New York. Therefore, the damage that he or the Chitauri<sup>1</sup> caused cannot be considered collateral. During the first phase of the MCU, especially in the movie *Avengers*, the deaths of normal people are not shown directly during the battle of New York. The reason behind this could be the age group that they were targeting: mainly teenagers and young adults. The element of gore and visual representation of death was almost completely missing from the MCU until the end of *Endgame*. Even in *Infinity War* and *Endgame*, with the exception of Gamora and Natasha Romanoff, almost all the other characters died in a very nonviolent way. In the movies of Hollywood, death and its associated moments have been portrayed with extreme care, for multiple reasons; the fear of censorship being the most dominant one. For films that have a young audience as their primary target, showing a lot of blood and gore on the screen would perhaps not bode well with the age ratings of the film. Possibly for this reason, a similar way of disappearing into oblivion was also shown at the end of *Harry Potter: Deathly Hallows Part II*, where Voldemort vanished into thin air following a VFX very similar to that of the VFX of the blip, as shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1

The most distinct exception in terms of displaying deaths comes in *Avengers*. The movie starts off with Loki arriving at one of the Avengers' facilities, and that building being decimated within minutes of his arrival. This bears enormous implications for not only the tax-paying audience of the United States of America (USA), whose hard-earned money let the government build these structures but also for the Avengers. Because of the destruction of the Stark Tower in the first Avengers movie, this group of misfits had to move to a new building, whose infrastructure allowed Ultron in *Avengers: Age of Ultron* to take the shape and position of an antagonist in that film. The amount of damage meted out by Ultron cannot be physically seen, as he is mostly an artificial intelligence with the body of one of Tony's iron soldiers, but it can be argued that in Ultron's attempt, a significant

portion of information (both about the Avengers and about common people) is leaked to the masses, thus compromising privacy, safety and much more. These consequences would not be visible till much later, because they work like slow poisoning. Even physically, Ultron wished to use the flying city of Sokovia as a meteorite to obliterate the population of earth and replace it with obedient machines. This hypothetical scenario would have obliterated humanity, but like Loki, since that was Ultron's intention, it cannot be counted as collateral damage. However, despite the Avengers saving almost all the lives in Sokovia, the property damage was insurmountable, which spiralled into the Civil War between Captain America and Iron Man. That Civil war, consequently, led to a lot of collateral damage as well.

### Significance of Collateral Damage

In this context, it becomes important to discuss why collateral damage is often considered more devastating than the actual spoils of war. The ones who go to war, voluntarily or not, are well aware of the fact that they are marching 'into the valley of death' (Tennyson). The fields, houses, animals and people that suffer as a consequence of this war (be it real or fantastic), had never signed up for the trauma and loss they faced. A Bengali proverb says, "When kings fight, the common man dies as wanton flies." (translation mine) Quite similarly, in the MCU, when the superheroes fight, it is the common people who lose their lives in the process. Very rarely can one witness an actual death of a superhero. The first notable instance comes in *Avengers: Age of Ultron* where Quicksilver dies after facing innumerable bullets while trying to save Hawkeye and a child. The film does not dwell on his death for long, and in the OTT show *Wanda Vision* the viewers are introduced to another version of Quicksilver. The first significant death (of one of the six original avengers) takes place in *Avengers: Endgame* (2019), as a result of collateral damage, in the form of Natasha Romanoff (Black Widow) sacrificing her life in Vormir in pursuit of the Soul Stone.

Her death is considered collateral damage due to two reasons. Firstly, the pursuit of the soul stone dictates that a sacrifice be made. Thanos sacrificed his daughter Gamora in *Avengers: Infinity War* (2018), and according to Marvel Comics Odin sacrificed his wife when he had begun collecting the Infinity Stones. Though collateral damage and sacrifice cannot be treated to be the same, here they are interchangeable because it happens as an addendum to another main event, causing deaths to the people whom the people behind their deaths did not originally want to kill. Secondly, any collateral damage includes the death of a person that could have been avoided had the conflict not taken place. The entire time heist in *Endgame* was a ploy to bring back the dead, which was arguably unnecessary. Therefore, Natasha's death could have been avoided (though at the larger cost of not bringing back all the blipped people), had the Avengers not decided on the time-heist. The genocide caused by Thanos was ethically problematic, but logistically sound. In my previous paper entitled "Is partial genocide acceptable? Ethics of genocide as an act of war in the Marvel Cinematic Universe", I argued,

The very idea of genocide as a means of alleviating the problems of the Universe in these two movies had some inherent technical problems with it. For instance, Thanos said that he would wipe out 'half of life' from the Universe. Taking just Earth into consideration, that would mean both half of the humans, plants, and animals. Will it be effective? The directors did not care to show whether the quality of life improves in the five years during which Thanos' snap was effective, even in a movie (*Endgame*) which lasted for the longest span in the MCU by a distinct margin. (Basu 2020: 57)

Thus, genocide could also be seen as collateral damage of what Thanos had set forth to do in *Infinity War*, or what he proposed at the final battle of *Endgame*.

It is in the last few films of the third phase of MCU that the equation with collateral damage gains more dimensions than it hitherto had. Amidst a plethora of options, the President of Marvel Studios Kevin Feige hands over the duty to direct two of the most important films in Marvel's history to the Russo brothers (Anthony and Joseph). After directing *Captain America: Civil War* successfully, the Russo brothers had two more box office successes with *Infinity War* and *Endgame*, which were also

well-accepted critically. The damages, however, were no joke. Within the universe, it caused significant destruction in the otherwise set lives. It is in these films that sacrifice meets collateral damage head-on, with the likes of Black Widow, Iron Man or even Doctor Strange sacrificing the Time Stone to save Iron Man's life. In the book *Avengers Infinity Saga and Philosophy*, the writer argues about the ways in which these two elements (sacrifice and collateral damage) clash

Self-sacrifice, in contrast, can, in the right context, be an example of heroism, of a new identity, assuming that it is done for the right reasons and without collateral damage. Black Widow's death meets these criteria. Ethics is restored, not suspended. The ending of the movie confirms this reading in its depiction of the death of Tony Stark, who manages to gain the Infinity Stones in order to defeat Thanos. In using them, however, he loses his own life in what amounts to an act of self-sacrifice (Arp and Rivera 2020: 146).

The act of Black Widow's sacrifice did not lead to any collateral damage, but Iron Man's snap (with all the six infinity stones) did lead to the obliteration of Thanos' army. Despite being the army of the antagonist, those were lives that were lost. Therefore, can Stark's act be called one of ubiquitous self-sacrifice, or is it more like the final act of war, something that the Mad Titan would also fail to undo? Stark's actions were undoubtedly heroic, but also conforming to his narcissistic traits, because it all became about him. *Endgame* has a funeral scene dedicated to him, whereas, for Natasha, no such ceremony is held. Rather, the avengers are seen sitting next to a lake in the three stages of grief. This allows us to question, whether the ethics surrounding the deaths of the Avengers (and the collateral damage alongwith it), are uniformly distributed for all characters, or is there a partiality at play here?

### Ethics of Collateral Damage



Figure 2

In the first *Iron Man* film, during the final fight between Stein and Stark, Stein mentions the damages he is causing both to Tony and his property as 'collateral damage' (vide figure 2). This brings the question, what are the ethical parameters of collateral damage in the MCU and how have they changed from 2008 to 2019? The primary point of difference (or progress, arguably) is that of the added agency in the hands of the protagonists and antagonists, with lesser and lesser agency in the hands of the passersby. When the franchise began, there was little to no damage to the property or lives of anyone that was not an antagonist (or, a part of their extended team). Soon enough, innocent lives were lost in *Avengers*, though that life loss is barely seen on camera. This becomes significant because the audience of the news within the film and the viewers of the film as a work of fiction, both forget about them the moment they exit from the scene, and the cinema hall. In addition to the argument made about this in a previous section of this paper, it could also be argued that this loss of life was not shown on screen to avoid the impact of collateral damage, and to take away the agency

of loss from the shoulders of the Avengers, with the lone exception of the Sokovia Accords. It cannot be argued that if the Avengers decided not to fight with Loki and his army, the damage would have been significantly less.

For instance, we see Hulk smashing straight into an office, breaking the glass windows and bouldering a few chairs on the way to fight the enemy. The Chitauri follows behind him. Who would pay for the losses that this anonymous office had to bear? At the end of the film, however, there arises the issue of accountability. “These so-called heroes have to be held responsible for the destruction done to this city”, says one of the Government officials in one of the many television clippings shown at the end of the movie (*Avengers*: 2010, 2:10:12). However, no such action takes place until *Civil War*. It comes as no surprise that the ones who have been affected by the spoils of this war had no say in this. It resembles the third-party insurance policies one gets while insuring an automobile. When one is in an accident where the driver of the insured vehicle is completely at fault, the other person/vehicle that suffers a loss is also compensated accordingly. Similarly, when the property and lives of the people of New York are damaged/lost in the crossfire between two parties, these third-party people should also have been equally compensated. Tim Gruenewald’s “Superhero Films After 9/11: Mitigating ‘Collateral Damage’ in the Marvel Cinematic Universe”, however, gives an example of how these superheroes avoided all the collateral damage that they could have, from the first *Avengers* movie, when Loki throws Stark off from his tower, “Stark employs his technology to save himself. As he is falling toward the ground, he directs his Iron Man suit to catch up to him, stop his descent in midfall, and save his life and that of the people on the Street who Stark would have hit.”

The agency of the first party (in this case, the Avengers) was partially shared by the antagonists across the films. However, it is in *Infinity War* that the antagonist (Thanos) manages to cause more collateral damage than the protagonists. Although it has already been argued that the ‘conquest, violence, slaughter’ (*Endgame* 2019: 2:13:48) conducted by Thanos are a part of his devious plans, the situation warrants more insights. He was about to wipe off half the population from the Universe in order to restore balance in it. In his mind, he was doing the right thing. In my previously mentioned paper, I argued how “all the deaths incurred by Thanos, directly or indirectly, was an active action taken by him in full possession of his conscience. The damage or loss of lives, therefore, is anything but ‘collateral’” (Basu 2020: 59). Therefore, following that logic, the deaths he had incurred could be considered as a part of his agency as an antagonist. Leaving the argument about whether he could be called an antagonist behind, he definitely causes the maximum damage to the earth, and by extension to the universe. Therefore, the added collateral damage is also a lot. Such added collateral damage could be better understood from one of the many possibilities (and/or consequences) that could have happened due to the blip: offices and other places of employment suddenly found their workforce cut down by half. Though this solved a large part of the unemployment problems, the initial losses that these companies had to go through must also have been paramount. Increasingly, one has to ponder how far this would actually contribute to solving the unemployment issue, as reducing the population would also automatically decrease the demand for any product/service.

### **Bearing the Brunt of the Losses**

In the second chapter of the book *Iron Man vs. Captain America and Philosophy: Give Me Liberty or Keep Me Safe*, entitled ‘Just Not the Hero Type (Not!)’, the editors Nicholas Michaud and Jessica Watkins mention ‘collateral damage’ five times, making the reader wonder whether the idea of a superhero is intrinsically linked to the concept of collateral damage or not. They define heroes as someone who “safeguard those around them, near or far, in a manner that’s moral. Granted, heroic actions may not be immediately recognized and appreciated as such, given the collateral damage involved, all the worse if cumulative. Iron Man’s and Captain America’s storylines, intertwined with the Avengers’ storyline, are increasingly preoccupied with this worry” (Michaud and Watkins 2018:



34). However, this is not just the case with Iron Man and Captain America. All the six main avengers, Hawkeye, Black Widow, Thor, Hulk and the other two already mentioned, have had their lives intertwined with causing and bearing the brunt of collateral damage. Hawkeye had to keep his family's existence a secret until *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, Black Widow had 'red on her ledger', that she would like to wipe off (referring to the death of Phil Coulson, among other incidents), Thor had to see his home planet Asgard get destroyed due to Ragnarok to ensure Hela's destruction. However, the biggest collateral damage was suffered by Captain America and Iron Man; the former lost his beloved Peggy Carter after being frozen in the ice for seventy years, and the latter lost Peter Parker, who was almost like a son to him, in the blip. In a see-saw of shifted losses, the superheroes might emerge victorious at the end of it all, but the price they have to pay is too high, at times.

Tony Stark says in his conversation with Steve Rogers in the first half of *Endgame* that he hopes to bring back what they have lost, but he has to keep what he has found, at all costs. This refers to his family, with Pepper Potts (his wife) and Morgan Stark (his daughter). He even jokingly mentions that it would be nice not to die trying, which, like an ominous foretelling, comes true an hour or so later in the film's timeline. This damage would never be compensated for the Stark family. Similarly, Steve had to take a very important decision in *Captain America: The First Avenger*, of letting Bucky go when he was hanging from the train. This damage caused both to himself and to Bucky not only haunted him during *Captain America: Winter Soldier*, but also *Captain America: Civil War*. The Hulk decided to vanish from the aerial radars of the planet in *Age of Ultron*, which led him to stay in the Hulk form for years and battle for entertainment in *Thor Ragnarok*. His defeat in the fight with Thanos at the beginning of *Infinity War* led him to stay as Bruce Banner even when the Avengers needed the Hulk in the second half of the film. Thor's sacrifice is seen at the end of *Infinity War*, when he gives away the kingdom of Asgard to Valkyrie to rule, and then ends up losing his physique and his will to live in the next five years. This transformation happens outside the view of the audience, as if to indicate that the damages that the heroes had to bear, would not sit well with the overall message of infallibility that the MCU wants to portray through its heroes.

However, the most significant sacrifice that anyone makes (before Stark gives up his life at the end of *Endgame*) is undoubtedly Black Widow. She enlists herself as collateral damage (because her death was not an intentional ploy by either Thanos or the Avengers), bearing the brunt of acquiring the Soul Stone by giving away her life. Clint Barton has to stand witness to that and became an accomplice in the process. Unlike most other collateral damage, this act cannot be undone due to the nature of the stones themselves. Since the life of Natasha was lost while acquiring the stones, one cannot use them to bring her back, which is a possibility the remaining Avengers discuss by the poolside. Irreversible collateral damage was the only type of damage, especially in the domain of lost lives, that the MCU encountered until it successfully ran a time heist in *Endgame*. To return to that model, even for the death of two Avengers (taking into account Stark's death as well) is a step in the right direction for the MCU. In the fourth phase of the MCU, however, the viewers are introduced to the domain of multiple deaths, the multiverse and a complicated plotline for each new movie and show, which inevitably complicates the issues relating to collateral damage, namely how for attaining one goal, multiple deaths are being mandated as acceptable by the heroes of the plot. In *Eternals*, the audience is introduced to the eponymous characters who had to stay silent for most of humanity's growth (and the downfall that came with the collateral damages). In another instance, in *Wakanda Forever*, the death of Queen Ramonda at the hands of Namor (the antagonist) could be understood as an instance of collateral damage, if one sides with the arguable protagonists of the film. However, the complications arise due to the nature of her death, which happened due to an infringement upon Namor's domain. Since the Wakandans had unrightfully encroached upon their land, their leader had prosecuted the trespasser(s). That could count as fair treatment according to the law, but is understood as an act of aggression by the Wakandans, leading to multiple casualties and loss of property in the later minutes of the film.

### A Multiverse of Multiple Deaths

In the MCU, the audience experiences partial genocide at the end of *Avengers: Infinity War*, which is reversed by the end of *Avengers: Endgame*. The estimated population of earth in 2019 (where the former film is set) was 7.7 Billion people (Worldometer). According to Thanos, when he is done “half of humanity will still be alive” (*Avengers: Infinity War*). Therefore, about 3.85 Billion people were ‘blipped’ away and brought back to life. Even if one can accept such a transgression for the superheroes whose lives are run by a set of rules unbeknownst to the mundane, but for common people, who fear death enough to let insurance companies have billions of dollars/rupees in revenue every quarter, this incident is no joke. An estimation of the collateral damage this event could have caused is actually foreseen in the subsequent films. In *Spiderman: No Way Home*, the TV anchor briefly states the problems one faced after the return of the blipped people.

There was a gap of five years between the death of these people and their subsequent revival in the next film. In these five years, the ones who had lost their dear ones were just starting to get used to the absence of someone they loved. A memorial was erected in San Francisco, called The Wall of the Vanished, to indicate the fact that the death of these people was not a normal death. Taking into consideration the fact this is a universe built on fantasy, one must extend Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s ideation of ‘willing suspension of disbelief’ to a broader spectrum. However, death was a significant marker in the MCU, and it was mentioned multiple times in the first two phases that it was the ultimate sacrifice anyone could make. For instance, Phil Coulson, at the end of the first Avengers movie, died to ensure that the six original avengers, namely Thor, Captain America, Iron Man, Hulk, Black Widow and Hawkeye got together as a team, and defeated Loki who was wreaking havoc upon New York City with his Chitaur. This instance of death, however, is rendered complicated if one takes into account the extended MEU or Marvel Entertainment Universe, which contains all the television shows aired by Marvel before Disney + Hotstar took over the streaming rights for all its shows. In the show *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*, we see Phil Coulson coming back to life, by using Kree blood<sup>1</sup> to bring him back to life.

Logistically speaking, multiple deaths of the same person could produce numerous problems for a civilised race. Some of those problems are discussed in *Spiderman: Far From Home*. However, there is a moral angle to this as well. Most of the characters and superheroes that Marvel had brought into the forefront were Christians, with a very recent approach of covering Non-European and Non-American heroes. In Christian theology, an instance of coming back from the dead exists, and that tale belongs to none other than Jesus. Therefore, it can be argued these instances are subtle nods to the age-old anecdote of Jesus’ resurrection. Superheroes, in their own ways, do trespass the rules by which common people live, and some of them, like Iron Man and Quick Silver, can even walk on water. What does the death of these superheroes imply then, in the context of the MCU? Especially, if one takes into consideration the case of Iron Man, this scenario becomes all the more clear. In a deleted clip from *Avengers: Endgame*, we see all the Avengers bending the knee to honour Tony Stark, who sacrificed his life to ensure the obliteration of Thanos and his army, who were not only causing destruction to the planet, but their leader, the mad Titan Thanos, was threatening to obliterate life as we know it. This had implications across the universe.

### Complications and Possibilities

Collateral damage as an idea is infinitely complicated by the concept of multiple deaths in the multiverse. The concept of the multiverse complicates the process of multiple deaths even further. In the latest Doctor Strange film *Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness*, we see that Strange is dead in one universe, while being alive in the others. Doctor Strange from Earth 616<sup>2</sup> uses the corpse of Doctor Strange from another universe to defeat the Scarlet Witch. Since the same person is alive in one universe and dead in the next, it brings forth the question, is it at all possible to determine death in the multiverse? If death cannot be determined for certain, how can the loss of life be considered

any type of damage, leave alone collateral? Death is the only event about which humanity was certain, across time periods, regimes, wars, and pandemics. In the first three phases of the Marvel movies, the creators had attempted to establish the superheroes as humane, be it Thor losing his power and hammer in the first Thor movie, or Tony Stark almost losing his life in *Iron Man*. These efforts took the MCU eleven years, and with the departure of the two stalwarts, Captain America and Iron Man, it could be argued that Marvel took to exploring the one theme that they had kept out of their films for the first three phases: multiple deaths. In the MEU as well, we see Moon Knight dying in the fourth episode of his eponymous series, only to be resurrected back in the sixth.

Therefore, with the examples discussed above, it could be argued that these multiple deaths unnecessarily complicate the plot line of MCU/MEU, so far so that in order to understand a newly launched OTT show, one is expected to watch hundreds of hours of content. This content, compromised by the saturation point that the MCU had reached with *Endgame*, only leaves one door open; that of bringing in the death of the same character in multiple ways and in multiple shows/films, in order to keep the readers confused about whether that character is actually dead or not. The most blatant example of this occurs in the show *Loki*, wherein the presence of many variants of Loki, one of them, Classic Loki, (played by Richard E. Grant) dies, while Loki (played by Tom Hiddleston) and Lady Loki (played by Sophia Di Martino) continue their search for Kang, the person who created the TVA (Time Variance Authority). This opens up an array of questions for posterity to ponder upon, namely: which characters would be considered eligible for multiple deaths, given that the MCU has already killed off every possible type of person, alien, and other miscellaneous beings in the blip, only to bring them back to life a film later. Subsequently, what would be the fate of new characters like Moon Knight, She-Hulk, Miss Marvel, the Eternals and so on, with reference to their deaths? In a recent announcement at the San Diego Comic-Con, Kevin Fiege, the current president of the MCU, announced an array of films and shows that Marvel plans to release in the next couple of years. With this bulk of content planned, it can be guessed that they would count on this motif of repeated deaths and reappearances of superheroes, in order to retain their audience.

This retention of the audience would automatically mean more collateral damage. With the arrival of the Multiverse, one can expect that collateral damage would not be uniform across dimensions and universes, due to the intrinsic differences between universes. This complicates the ethics of collateral damage. If the loss of life and/or property cannot be completely understood as valid and applicable everywhere in the MCU, then how can that be called collateral damage, to begin with? In the animated series *What If...*, there are multiple possibilities of the MCU going in different directions, some of which find continuity in *Doctor Strange: Multiverse of Madness*. With such a complicated timeline and plot, does the question of collateral damage matter as much as it used to in the initial days of the MCU? In the coming days, one would not be surprised if the ethical conundrum regarding collateral damage and plot lines like *Civil War* takes backstage. In the present MCU, entertainment and constant production of content have taken over the mantle from complex plots and ethical queries that were offered up to the third phase of MCU. This could open up a significant array of interpretations in many domains, including ethics. Collateral damage, therefore, allows the viewers to see beyond the obvious glory of the heroes and the unflinching villainy of the antagonists; allowing us to understand that just like every cloud has a silver lining, every coin has a flip side to it as well. Thus, the collateral damages that occur can be understood as the flip side of the coin which the heroes of the MCU do not want the audience or the people of their multiverse to see. It is kept face down on the table of accolades that they have accumulated, and only rarely, when one picks it up to examine it, can one see that there is another side to these stories that demand to be told more.



### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Chitauri is an army of Aliens who attacked New York. This army was supplied by Thanos, the villain par excellence at the end of Phase 3 of the MCU.
- <sup>2</sup> The Kree are a militaristic race of mostly blue-skinned humanoids from the planet Hala. One of the most technically advanced races in the galaxy, the Kree are skilled in genetic engineering and are responsible for the creation of the Inhumans on Earth.
- <sup>3</sup> According to the fifth volume of the *Marvel Handbook: A to Z*, the events portrayed in the MCU and MEU take place in universe 616, one of the innumerable universes in the multiverse of MCU/Marvel Entertainment Universe or MEU.

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