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***Avengers: Endgame*–Understanding the film’s Time Travel Logic and its Consequent Narrative Inconsistencies**

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Abstract:

Avengers: Endgame is the final film in the MCU’s Infinity Saga. The film which tells the tale of the Avengers’ last stand against their greatest foe yet, Thanos, emerged as the highest-grossing film of all time and has been the recipient of numerous awards and accolades since its release. The time travel aspect in the film is one of the high-points in its narrative. However, the time travel logic that the film explores is far from perfect and ends up creating several narrative inconsistencies. In this paper, I will try to understand the Many Worlds idea of Time explored in *Endgame*. I will also be looking at what this means for the overall narrative of the Marvel Cinematic Universe. And lastly, I will be looking at how *Endgame*’s time travel logic creates contradictions in both the narrative of the film as well as the earlier understanding of Time within the Marvel Cinematic Universe.

Keywords: *Avengers: Endgame*, Time Travel, Many World’s Theory, Narrative Inconsistency, Causality, Plot Holes

1. Introduction

Time travel has been a popular trope in science-fiction stories ever since the concept was popularised by H. G. Wells in his 1895 novel, *The Time Machine*. The fascination with which the fictional concept was received a century ago remains more or less the same to this day. Later, when Albert Einstein propounded his famous Theory of Relativity, it opened up the concept of Time and time travel to scientific study, which further concretised the idea of time travel.

Over the years, we have seen several works of fiction such as novels, short stories, comics, games, television shows and films that have explored the time travel idea in one way or another. Works of literature such as Washington Irving’s *Rip Van Winkle* (1819), Mark Twain’s *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court* (1889), Isaac Asimov’s *A Pebble in the Sky* (1950), Yasutaka Tsutsui’s *The Girl Who Lept Through Time* (1967), Douglas Adams’ *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe* (1980), J. K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (1999),

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etc.; television shows like *Dr. Who*, *Star Trek: Enterprise*, *Lost*, *Fringe*, *The Flash*, *Legends of Tomorrow*, etc.; Films such as *The Terminator* (1984), *Back to the Future* (1985), *Groundhog Day* (1983), *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time* (2010), *X-Men: Days of Future Past* (2014), etc. are a few of the plethora of examples in the popular media of works that have engaged with the concept of time travel. *Avengers: Endgame* (2019) is one of the latest entrants to this list.

Avengers: Endgame, the final film in the Infinity Saga of the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU), is a tale of the Avengers' last stand against their greatest foe yet. The time travel aspect in the film is one of the high-points in its narrative, and the film explores how the Avengers use the aid of time travel to save the day. However, the film's execution of its time travel logic creates inconsistencies in the narrative of the film.

In this paper, I will be trying to understand the "Many Worlds" idea of time that is pitched in the film. I will also be looking at the ramifications that such an idea of time has on the overall narrative structure of the MCU. Lastly, I will be looking at how *Endgame*'s time travel logic creates contradictions in both the narrative of the film as well as the earlier understanding of Time within the MCU. I will be using Narrative Methodology in my research as I will be analysing how the

narrative of the film is constructed and how its time travel logic is positioned within the narrative.

2. Time in the MCU

Cultures across the world have different conceptions of Time. But there is a general consensus that time is imperceptible and immaterial. We cannot see it, hear it or touch it. When people say that they can perceive the passing of time, that's just a figure of speech. In reality, they perceive something else – the ticking of a clock, or their heartbeat, or other manifestations of the many biological rhythms below the level of one's consciousness. But whatever time is, it lies outside the grasp of our senses (Gleick 156).

There are two fundamentally opposed classical conceptions of Time which hold precedence over all other views. Grey talks about two factions – one which follows the teachings of the Greek philosopher Heraclitus and the other who follow Parmenides. Heraclitus believed that the world was in a state of perpetual flux, which meant that there was no distinction in terms of past, present or future and that only the present existed. In stark contrast, Parmenides believed that truth and reality were stable and eternal in the world. Parmenides was of the opinion that the past and the future were as real as the present (Grey 55–56). Keeping the two opposing

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views in mind, it is clear that only the Parmenidean view can accommodate time travel. A timeline with a clear sense of past, present and future is a pre-requisite for time travel. The MCU ascribes to such a Parmenidean view of Time, with a clear understanding of the past, the present and the future.

There are three ways of approaching the idea of a timeline. The first is to understand the timeline as something that is fixed. This means that things will unfold the way they are meant to unfold. This view follows the fatalistic idea of time that is preached by most of the religions in the world. A second approach to understanding the timeline is by looking at the timeline as something that is changeable. This means that by altering events, one can influence the consequent events. A majority of stories that deal with time travel ascribe to this idea of a timeline. The third approach is the one that posits alternate universes. This is known in science circles as the Everett Interpretation or the Many Worlds Theory. According to the Many Worlds theory of quantum mechanics, a branch in the space-time occurs every time a decision is made (Gott 15–16).

The first issue that surfaces is the fact that the MCU does not seem to decide as to which of the three approaches to the idea of a timeline it wants to follow. We are first hinted about the “fixed” nature of

the MCU’s timeline in the 2016 film *Doctor Strange*, where Tilda Swinton’s The Ancient One says, “I’ve prevented countless terrible futures. And after each one, there’s always another. And they all lead here... but never further.” (*Doctor Strange* 01:23:37–01:23:46). The idea of a fixed timeline is further solidified in *Avengers: Endgame* where Mark Ruffalo’s Bruce Banner (Hulk) goes on to explain their proposed time travel saying, “Time doesn’t work that way. Changing the past doesn’t change the future.” (*Avengers: Endgame* 58:57–59:01).

However, having a timeline that is unchangeable does not bode well for the Avengers. They are superheroes after all, and they are supposed to save the day. This primal need becomes the foundation for the entire plot of *Endgame*. The heroes set forth to attempt a “time-heist” to undo the events of the past, or to put it more accurately, to erase the events of the past. If the MCU believed that the timeline was fixed and concrete, then *Endgame* had no reason to exist at all. Through *Endgame*, the MCU’s narrative finds a way to allow the Avengers to be the heroes they are.

The MCU also tries to incorporate the alternate universe approach into their understanding of the timeline through *Endgame*. The Ancient One alludes to the Many Worlds Theory of time when she explains, “The Infinity Stones create what you experience as the flow of time. Remove

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one of the stones, and that flow splits.” (*Avengers: Endgame* 01:24:00–01:24:08). In this manner, the film ends up assimilating the three different approaches to understanding the timeline, each of the approaches being adapted to different degrees, and the resulting understanding of the timeline opens up the narrative to several inconsistencies and plot holes.

One of the reasons for the inconsistencies in the film’s narrative stems from its confused idea of general causality itself. There is a sequence in *Endgame* when James Rhodes (War Machine), played by Don Cheadle, suggests that they should travel back in time and find baby Thanos. That way, they would have dealt with their enemy long before he becomes a threat to them. Another suggestion along similar lines, is given by Scott Lang (Ant-Man), played by Paul Rudd, who suggests that they go back in time and acquire the Infinity Stones before Thanos ever gets them. In light of the many films dealing with time travel, a few of which are referred to in *Endgame* itself (such as *Star Trek*, *Terminator*, *Time Cop*, *Time After Time*, *Quantum Leap*, *Wrinkle in Time*, *Somewhere in Time*, *Hot Tub Time Machine*, *Bill and Ted’s Excellent Adventure* and *Back to the Future*), these suggestions seem sensible.

However, if one were to adhere to the rules of general causality, then both Rhodes’ and Lang’s suggestions can be

countered. According to the general theory of causality, every effect has a cause, and every cause triggers an effect (Grey 63–64). If we apply this to Rhodes’ idea of killing baby Thanos, then events would unfold in such a manner – The Avengers who are still recovering from the reality of their defeat at Thanos’ hands will travel back in time, find baby Thanos and kill him. This would be where causality kicks in. Because Thanos died as a baby, the events that made him the Avengers’ enemy would never occur, implying that the Avengers would never have had a reason to travel back in time to kill baby Thanos in the first place. This means that baby Thanos will survive and we get back to right where we started, which the Avengers is considering the killing of baby Thanos.

Applying the same logic to Lang’s idea, we get – The Avengers going back in time and finding the Infinity Stones before Thanos could get his hands on them. This means that the events in *Avengers: Infinity War* do not occur and the Avengers have no reason to set forth on such a quest at all. Again, we get right back to square one. This paradoxical situation is what would have arisen if either of the two suggestions had been considered. If the MCU followed such an idea of causation, then this would have been an adequate explanation for not considering Rhodes’ or Lang’s ideas.

But *Endgame* follows a different idea of causation and this is depicted in the

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sequence where Rhodes' and Lang's ideas are shot down by Banner who says, "Think about it. If you travel to the past, that past becomes your future and your former present becomes the past, which can't now be changed by your new future." (*Avengers: Endgame* 59:27–59:37). What this means is that, in the MCU's timeline events that have already occurred will not be affected even if events in the past are altered. Undoubtedly, this is a brilliant way to work around the possibility of causal paradoxes that could arise as a consequence of time travel. Unfortunately, *Endgame* does not remain true to this particular view of time.

As the story progresses, Banner travels back in time to 2012 to find the Time Stone, which was in possession of the Ancient One in New York. It is here that the seeds of inconsistency are sown in the narrative. The Ancient One explains that by removing the Time Stone from her time (I will be calling this timeline "Prime" in the rest of the paper), Banner would end up creating a branch reality. In this branch reality, without the Time Stone to use against the "forces of darkness", the world would be overrun, and millions would suffer. Banner offers a solution to this problem, and he promises that once the Avengers have used the stones, they would return the stones back to the points in time they were taken from, so as to erase any branch reality that would have been created.

Now, this sounds like a reasonable solution. Only, one can't help but wonder why there is such a need for this at all?

When the Avengers had set forth on their time heist, it was established that any actions they commit in the past, would have no direct consequence to the future. Because, as Banner had put it, once in the past, that past would have become their present and the future they came from, would have become their new past. Which means that, removing the Time Stone from timeline Prime should not have made any difference at all? Because, all the events in the actual future, in which the Time Stone's presence saved the day, would now become events of the past. This means that, a prospective future absent of the Time Stone would not have been influenced by the events of this new past at all.

While this is a major inconsistency, there is plausible reasoning that could be levelled in its defence. It can be argued that Banner's initial idea of the timeline was incorrect, and the Ancient One makes Banner understand the true nature of the timeline. This would explain why Banner is convinced of the Ancient One's fear and why he assures that measures would be taken to erase the branch realities that would be created as a result of the Avengers' quest.

What such a defense also establishes is that general causality works as it should,

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in the MCU after all. And because *Endgame* pitches what sounds like the Many Worlds Theory, this means that any changes or alterations that happen to timeline Prime will lead to a branching of time and in this branch reality, events will unfold in a manner that corresponds to the change in timeline Prime. While Banner agrees to erase all the possible branch realities, and the Avengers manage to do precisely that to a certain extent, the narrative conveniently ignores several branch realities that spawn during the course of the film. This makes us wonder, did the Avengers really do their jobs then? And because *Endgame* tries too hard to make its narrative cater to an idea of total fan service, it ends up overlooking certain plot holes as well.

3. The Loki Problem

The first blaring issue that the film fails to address is the consequence of the mishap that occurs when the team of Captain America (played by Chris Evans), Iron Man (played by Robert Downer Jr.), Hulk and Ant-Man travel back in time, to 2012-New York. They arrive just after the conclusion of the Chitauri invasion of New York. The original plan is for Hulk to retrieve the Time Stone from the New York Sanctum, while the remaining three heroes retrieve the Tesseract (Space Stone) and the Sceptre (Mind Stone) from Stark Tower.

While Captain America succeeds in securing the Sceptre after a brief duel with the 2012 version of himself, Iron Man's and Ant-Man's plan to retrieve the Tesseract fails due to an untimely intervention by the 2012-Hulk. In the confusion that ensues, Loki (played by Tom Hiddleston) manages to get his hands on the Tesseract and uses its power to open a portal, escape from Stark Tower and away from the reach of the assembled Avengers. This forces Captain America and Iron Man to make another time travel trip. This time to 1970, to retrieve the Tesseract from that time period.

Firstly, it goes without being said that an event like Loki escaping with the Tesseract will definitely create a new branch of time. And there is nothing that the Avengers can do to erase this branch reality. This is because Captain America and Iron Man bring the Tesseract from 1970 to the present (2023 in the film), meaning towards the end of the film, when Captain America is tasked with returning the stones to their rightful points in timeline Prime, he takes it back to 1970 to prevent the creation of another branch in time. (I do not even want to get into the question of why Captain America was even sent alone for such a crucial task. Wondering how he is going to pull off such a task solo, is another question I want to avoid, mainly because it does not directly relate to time travel.) Nevertheless, Loki escaping with the Tesseract was an unforeseen complication

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as far as the Avengers were concerned, and *Endgame* does not offer any explanation as to whether this issue was addressed at all.

If Captain America managed to return the Tesseract to the original point it was taken from, i.e. to the S.H.I.E.L.D headquarters in 1970, then it would erase the previously created branch, and events in timeline Prime would unfold as they did right up to the Chitauri invasion in 2012. At this point, after being captured by the 2012 Avengers, thanks to the intervention of 2023-Iron Man and 2023-Ant-Man, Loki manages to escape with the Tesseract and a new branch of time gets created. And in this new branch reality, the consequences of Loki escaping with the Tesseract would be dire.

Because Loki has now escaped with the Tesseract, Thor would not be able to return to Asgard to put Loki on trial as was his original plan. In this new reality, Loki, who still has not gone through any of the personal growth that he did post the events of *The Avengers* in timeline Prime, will be running amok on Earth doing evil with the Tesseract. The Loki in this reality would remain the desperate and evil Loki of *The Avengers*.

This also implies that in this new reality, events of *Thor: The Dark World* will unfold very differently. Because Loki is no longer imprisoned in Asgard, Thor will be unable to enlist Loki's help to fight

against the Dark Elf Malekith (played by Christopher Eccleston). The Dark Elves led by Malekith had planned on using the power of the Aether (Reality Stone) and a cosmic event known as the Convergence to destroy the universe. In timeline Prime, Malekith's plan was thwarted by Thor with considerable help from Loki. However, in the new branch reality, Thor would have to face Malekith alone. This would probably not bode well for this new reality, and this new reality may see a destroyed universe at the hands of Malekith, i.e. this alternate universe will not survive long enough for the Avengers to even face a threat like Thanos.

The new reality that spawns from Loki's escape is something that the Avengers cannot undo, simply because there is nothing that they could do about it. *Endgame* chooses to ignore this fact, and the narrative does not venture anywhere in that direction. The film ends pretending that the Avengers have fixed everything.

4. The Ronan Problem

While one team of the Avengers is dispatched to 2012, another team consisting of Nebula (played by Karen Gillan) and War Machine are sent to Morag in 2014 to retrieve the Power Stone. The events that unfold here singularly leads to the epic final battle in *Endgame*. Even though Nebula and War Machine are successful in retrieving the Power Stone, Nebula is unable to return

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to the future. She is unable to do so due to some unexplained interference that she experiences along with her 2014 self.

Because of this interference, 2014-Thanos (played by Josh Brolin) becomes aware of the plan of the 2023-Avengers. He captures 2023-Nebula and sends 2014-Nebula disguised as 2023-Nebula back to 2023 so that the 2014-Nebula could open a time portal for Thanos and his army to breach to 2023. Even though the Avengers killed the 2023-Thanos in the beginning of the film, the appearance of 2014-Thanos in their time sets the stage for the final confrontation between the two parties.

The final battle takes place on a massive scale, and with a lot of difficulty and sacrifice, the Avengers manage to defeat Thanos once and for all. However, there are temporal aspects to this confrontation that is overlooked by *Endgame*.

When 2014-Thanos decided to time travel to the future, he brought along with him 2014-Gamora (played by Zoe Saldana) too. When Thanos and Gamora suddenly vanished from a certain point in timeline Prime, an event of such magnitude is bound to create another branch in time. A branch that the Avengers have no clue of.

The reason for choosing 2014-Morag to retrieve the Power Stone was because it was at this point that Star-Lord (played by Chris Pratt) stole the Orb

containing the Power Stone. Star Lord's acquisition of the Orb launches a series of events that transpire in *Guardians of the Galaxy*. The film follows the adventures of Star-Lord as he is joined by Gamora, Rocket (voiced by Bradley Cooper), Drax (played by Dave Bautista) and Groot (voiced by Vin Diesel). Together they fight the zealot Ronan The Accuser, who is obsessed on using the Power Stone to conquer the universe.

When Thanos and Gamora disappear from the timeline, in the new branch reality, the Guardians of the Galaxy would never have been formed. Gamora was instrumental in banding Star-Lord and the team together. Her absence would mean that the various characters never teamed up at all. The absence of Thanos from the timeline also would lead to dire consequences. Ronan originally sought the Orb to please Thanos. Ronan, who was well aware of the mad Titan's power, feared Thanos. He sought Thanos' help in destroying the planet Xandar, and he wanted the Orb to bargain with him. But when Ronan realises that the Orb held an Infinity Stone, he is consumed by his thirst for revenge and greed for power, and decides to betray Thanos and use the Power Stone for his own agenda.

In timeline Prime, when Ronan moves to destroy Xandar using the Power Stone, it is the Guardians of the Galaxy who defeat him and save the planet from

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assured obliteration. But in the new branch reality, without Gamora, there would be no Guardians of the Galaxy to stop Ronan and his mad rampage. Perhaps, in this reality, Thanos would have intervened and stopped Ronan for good, if Thanos existed at that time. Thanos would have had reason to intervene as he had been betrayed by Ronan. Thanos would have had both motive and means (he commanded one of the largest armies in the universe). But in the eventuality that even Thanos did not exist in that timeline, there is no one to stop Ronan.

Ronan would go on to destroy planet after planet, thanks to the power of the Power Stone. And in time, he would subjugate the universe. This reality if not worse, is no better than the universe that Thanos had envisioned.

The Avengers knew that they had to return the stones to their respective points in time. But, even if Captain America returned the Power Stone to 2014-Morag, he would only be erasing one branch of time. Because the Avengers had killed 2014-Thanos and his entire army, in 2023, there is absolutely no way to return 2014-Thanos or his army to their original place in timeline Prime. Also, towards the end of *Endgame*, 2014-Gamora joins the 2023-Guardians of the Galaxy and leaves with them towards a new life. The Avengers are not even bothered about the status of 2014-Gamora.

Similarly, because 2023-Nebula killed her 2014 self, there is no way to bring back 2014-Nebula to her original point in timeline Prime. And without Nebula, the events of *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2* would have occurred differently, and probably not in favour of the universe. Nebula had played a crucial role in helping the Guardians of the Galaxy defeat the celestial planet, Ego (played by Kurt Russel). Without both Nebula and Gamora, the Guardians of the Galaxy would probably have lost the fight with Ego and Ego would have gone ahead with his plan to consume the universe. A fate, far worse than Thanos' vision of the universe.

The narrative of *Endgame* simply avoids addressing these possible branch realities and simply moves on.

5. The Time Stone Abuse

Another inconsistency that stands out in *Endgame* is in the way the Time Stone has been handled in the film. From *Doctor Strange*, we get a fair idea of what the Time Stone is capable of in the MCU. However, it is surprising to see characters in *Endgame* act clueless about the Time Stone and its capabilities.

We are first introduced to the Time Stone in *Doctor Strange*. When Karl Mordo (played by Chiwetel Ejiofor) and Wong (played by Benedict Wong) catch Dr. Strange (played by Benedict Cumberbatch) experimenting with the powers of the Eye

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of Agamotto (Time Stone), Strange is reprimanded for his actions. The explanation given by Mordo is that, “Temporal Manipulations can create branches in time. Unstable dimensional openings. Spatial paradoxes! Time loops! You wanna get stuck reliving the same moment over and over forever or never having existed at all?” (*Doctor Strange* 51:41-51:54). Strange is told that using the Time Stone is equivalent to breaking the laws of nature, but this does not stop him from using the Time Stone anyway.

There is a sequence in the *Doctor Strange*, where Strange uses the Time Stone to bring a half-eaten apple back to its whole form. He even uses the stone to make the apple experience its future, where it gets eaten and then rots. From this instance, we get the hint that the Time Stone can reverse the effects of time on specific objects as well as put objects through different phases of its age. Strange then goes on to use the same technique to bring back the pages in a book that was previously torn away. It becomes clear that this ability of the Time Stone is not limited to inanimate objects alone, in the Hong Kong climax sequence.

In the final battle sequence in *Doctor Strange*, the Hong Kong Sanctum has fallen by the time Strange and Mordo arrive. There are a lot of casualties, and Wong is one of them. Strange again uses the Time Stone to reverse time, enough to undo the damage that Kaecilius (played by

Mads Mikkelsen) and his followers have wreaked upon the Sanctum. In fact, Strange specifically focuses on a dead Wong and uses the stone to revive him. Following this, Strange uses the stone to trap Dormammu, a villainous celestial entity from a dimension where time is non-existent, in a time loop. Dormammu is forced to relive a particular moment in time over and over again until he gives in to Strange’s demands and decides to leave Earth alone. Such was the power of the Time Stone.

In *Endgame*, however, the abilities of the Time Stone are not even mentioned, let alone used. One of the most iconic scenes in the film was the Iron Man Snap, where Iron Man manages to swipe the Infinity Stones from Thanos’ gauntlet and integrate them with his suit before using the stones to snap Thanos and his army out of existence. Because Iron Man was only human, his body could not take the toll of using the Infinity Stones and Iron Man ends up sacrificing himself to save the day.

While this sequence in *Endgame* is as heroic as it gets, one cannot help but wonder, was Iron Man’s death necessary at all? Ideally Dr. Strange should have used the Time Stone to revive Iron Man, but such an idea is not even considered in the film. It is not that no one apart from Dr. Strange knew of the Time Stones abilities. In the battle of Wakanda in *Avengers: Infinity War*, Scarlet Witch (played by

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Elizabeth Olsen) is forced to kill Vision (played by Paul Bettany) to destroy the Mind Stone so that Thanos cannot complete the gauntlet. But Thanos appears and reverses time for the dead Vision, reviving him and the Mind Stone in the process. Thanos then goes on to kill Vision before taking the Mind Stone for himself.

Endgame does not even try to use this logic to save the character Iron Man. It is almost as though the narrative was adamant on making a martyr of Iron Man that it made the Avengers overlook the fact that they were in possession of the Time Stone and that they had Dr. Strange with them, who was an expert in its use.

A possible explanation for *Endgame* choosing to kill off Iron Man could be derived from what Dr. Strange had told Iron Man in *Infinity War*. Dr. Strange had mentioned that out of the 14 million or so possible futures, the Avengers were able to beat Thanos in only one. Keeping this in mind, it could be read that the one future where the Avengers beat Thanos was the one in which Iron Man died.

However, from a character development standpoint, Iron Man had to sacrifice himself. Tony Stark a.k.a. Iron Man had started out as a selfish, self-centred and an apathetic individual who did not care if or how his actions affected the people around him. Over the course of the MCU's narrative, Iron Man grows into a

more responsible individual who becomes willing enough to lay down his life for the greater good. If Iron Man had been revived following the final battle with Thanos, then his sacrifice would not have made even half the impact it did. Tony Stark's death had to stick, or his selfless sacrifice that enabled the threat of Thanos to be permanently and irrevocably neutralized would have rung hollowly.

But this again fails to explain why the Avengers did not even consider using the Time Stone on Iron Man after the conclusion of the battle with Thanos. Also, the possibility of using the Time Stone to trap Thanos and his army in a time loop, one similar to the one that Dr. Strange had used on Dormammu, is also not approached.

6. The Captain America Conundrum

One of the most confusing narrative inconsistencies that *Endgame* leaves us with is the one that revolves around Steve Rogers' a.k.a Captain America's fate. A few days after the climactic battle with Thanos and the Avengers' victory against the Titan, Captain America is tasked with taking the Infinity Stones back to their respective points in timeline Prime from where they had been taken, to clip all the branches of reality that would have been created as a result of the movement of the stones.

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Captain America travels back in time to fulfil his mission, and everyone expects him to return to the present soon. However, we see an aged Steve Rogers sitting a fair distance away from the battlefield. When Winter Soldier (played by Sebastian Stan) and Falcon (played by Anthony Mackie) go on to confront the old Steve Rogers, Rogers explains to Falcon that he decided to live out the rest of his life that he had missed. Tony Stark had told him to “try and get a life” earlier in the MCU’s narrative, and now that Rogers had a chance, he chose to take it.

We are told that once Captain America had returned the stones to their respective places in time, he decided to stay back in the past and live the life he had missed out on, thanks to him going in ice following the events in *Captain America: The First Avenger*. This becomes problematic because this goes against the time travel logic that *Endgame* preached until that moment.

If Captain America had reinserted himself back into the timeline at some point in the past, then such an event would have created a new branch of reality. It would be in this new branch of reality that Captain America lives out his days with the woman he loved, Peggy Carter (played by Hayley Atwell). This means that there is no way that an aged Steve Rogers could have met Falcon and Winter Soldier in 2023 in timeline Prime.

Now, it can be argued that Steve Rogers lived in the alternate timeline until he got old. And once he was done with that life, he time travelled back to the point in timeline Prime that he had left from (i.e. in 2023), using the same time travel bracelets that had enabled him to time travel in the first place. That way he would have been able to exit that new alternate reality and enter back into the reality that is timeline Prime.

But this defense also fails to make sense because if an aged Captain America had indeed used the time travel bracelets to return from the new reality to 2023, then he would have appeared on the mini Quantum Realm Tunnel that he had originally used to time travel in tandem with the bracelets. He would also have been wearing his time travel suit. However, we see an aged and casually dressed Steve Rogers sitting on a bench away from the site where the time travel apparatus has been set up by Hulk and the others.

This clearly means that Steve Rogers did not use time travel to get back to 2023. He arrived at that point in time through the ordinary passage of time. But if this is the case, then that means that for some reason, when Captain America reinserted himself back into the timeline, the timeline did not split to create a new branch of reality. And this is grossly inconsistent with the rules of time travel established in *Endgame*.

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7. The issue of the Infinity Stones

Yet another plot hole that *Endgame* does not pay attention to is the status of the Infinity Stones and the impact of their current status to the MCU. In the first half of *Endgame*, the Ancient One had emphasised on the fact that it was the Infinity Stones that created the flow of time in the MCU. Their role in the natural order of things was so great that if any of the stones were removed from their respective positions in the timeline, then such an act would have far-reaching consequences such as the creation of entirely new branches of reality. And according to the Ancient One, millions would suffer in a reality without even one of the Infinity Stones.

Keeping this in mind, one cannot help but wonder, if the Infinity Stones were that important to the MCU, then when Thanos destroyed the Infinity Stones for good at the beginning of *Endgame*, then such an act should have spelt complete doom for the MCU. Thanos used the Infinity Gauntlet to snap a second time to destroy the stones. If the stones create the flow of time in the MCU, then their complete destruction should have broken time or destroyed the universe.

The Avengers should have been faced with the consequence of the destruction of the Infinity Stones. At least, the looming threat that such an eventuality

poses to the fate of the universe should have been addressed at some point in *Endgame's* narrative. If the stones were as important as they were portrayed as, then an event like Thanos killing half of all life in the universe would pale in comparison to what would happen if the stones simply ceased to exist. Logically, such an event should erase the entire universe itself, across all of Time.

It is strange that *Endgame* shows the destruction of the Infinity Stones by Thanos in the year 2019, and then the story moves to 2023, to a future that continues to exist without any change except for the fact that half the life in the universe has been extinguished (but that is a direct consequence of Thanos' first snap). At no point in its narrative does anyone in the *Endgame* raise the issue of what it means to live in a world without Infinity Stones or if such a world would exist at all. The fact that the narrative simply overlooks the absence of the most powerful objects in the universe also spells a flaw in *Endgame's* narrative flow.

8. Conclusion

Avengers: Endgame is a film that boasts of technical excellence and it pitches its story on a massive canvas, and that makes it a treat to watch. The film, in terms of cinematic experience, manages to leave no stone unturned. It is a landmark film that brings the famous MCU Infinity Saga to its

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close. While the film has to be lauded for its execution and the performance of the actors, it must be pointed out that the film's narrative is far from being flawless.

Avengers: Endgame successfully manages to create a fresh model of time travel using a combination of Everett's Many Worlds Theory and the classical idea that events in time are fixed. While this model of time travel manages to formulate a time travel logic that helps bypass known time travel obstacles like causal loops and the Grandfather Paradox, the film's narrative falls prey to the same logic it crafts. *Endgame's* narrative ends up having a number of contradictions owing to the film's usage of its time travel logic.

Endgame, as a narrative is heavily dependent on the aspect of time travel. Without it, the film has no reason to exist. Perhaps the film could have been done differently, without incorporating time travel on such a scale. However, time travel remains a major part of the film and in its clearly-evident quest to deliver complete fan-service, the film's narrative ends up with plot holes and inconsistencies.

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- Avengers: Infinity War*. Directed by Anthony Russo and Joe Russo. Marvel Studios, 2018.
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- The Avengers*. Directed by Joss Whedon. Marvel Studios, 2012.
- Thor: The Dark World*. Directed by Alan Taylor. Marvel Studios, 2013.