

Ned “Ganke Lee” Leeds: This is the easiest issue to address, since I actually really liked the character and I thought the actor did a fantastic job and was hugely charismatic – in fact, so much so that him being so likable just underscored all my problems with this Peter, whose personality begins and ends at “is the main character.” But Ned is also... Ganke. Not just visually, although that’s a big part of it. Ned is smart and geeky. He’s the best friend who is practically part of your family he’s over so much. He’s instantly supportive and invested in Peter being Spider-Man, willing to help him keep his secret but also desperate for a little piece of that Spider-Man limelight. He’s Ganke. And there is absolutely no valid excuse for why Marvel Studios would take Miles Morales’ best friend and put him in a Peter Parker movie. What’s going to happen when they make the animated Miles Morales movie? Will he not have his best friend in it? Will they alter Ganke’s appearance so as to avoid confusion with Ned? Or will they just pretend it never happened? Oh, here’s Ganke, isn’t it funny how much he looks like Ned Leeds? How little do they think of their audience?



If they wanted a best friend for Peter, and they didn’t want to use an available character in canon (I’d personally have gone with Mary Jane, his best friend in Ultimate Spider-Man, giving the hugely charismatic Zendaya a bigger role with more lines and a better set-up for a future love story, or reinvented it so Flash is his friend in high school, echoing their future close friendship – after all, it’s not like this Flash wasn’t a total reinvention of 616 Flash Thompson, a football star struggling with violently abusive home life who lashes out at school) for whatever asinine reason, they should have invented an original character. They should never have ripped off not only Miles’ best friend but in fact Miles’ entire dynamic with Ganke in order to prop up Peter and make him even more of the relatable everyday boy, as opposed to TASM’s Peter, the aloof outsider, or even Raimi’s Peter, the nebbish nerd, the schlimazel of all Spider-Man adaptations.

Let me be perfectly clear: I don’t think slapping Ned Leeds’, a white character and canonically an abusive husband, name over Ganke Lee, an Asian character, is a thing that can be ignored or glossed over. There was no attempt to even make Nedke his own individual character – he is a rip-off of Ganke Lee down to his *hobbies*. Ganke Lee loves Legos. Ned Leeds loves being a reporter for the Bugle and neglecting his wife in foreign countries. A terrible strike from the

beginning – and don't think I didn't spot the white kid they said months ago was actually playing Ganke Lee during the decathlon. You can't put white-out over this. Stop calling "Ned" Ned when he is Ganke. Don't let Marvel Studios get away with stealing from Miles Morales to prop up Peter Parker.

Property over People: One of the things I really disliked about this movie – perhaps the thing I disliked most, actually – was that the stakes Spider-Man fought for were, in both the big first and last fights, stuff. Not people. Not lives. Things.

Look at the first fight: he sees a group of masked robbers breaking into a bank so that they can rob the ATMs using the Vulture's cool alien tech because they are, I suppose, not very creative people. I'm going to be real honest with you all here: this is a victimless crime. Literally. The bank is closed. There is no one in it, not even a lone security guard. The money in those ATMs is the bank's, and the bank is doubtlessly insured.

Should Peter have stopped this robbery? Yes, robbery is wrong, BUT as a result of his attempting to stop the robbery, a whole city block gets destroyed. The movie frames this as nonlethal – Peter rescuing both the bodega owner and his cat – but, even if no one died, which frankly seems impossible to me given the level of damage, how many of those homes and small local businesses were insured on the same level as that bank? Who is going to pay for the repairs to the block? That bank, whose money was saved by Spider-Man? Don't make me laugh.

Here's the thing: the bank they break into is one of the movie's advertisers. "Save Like a Hero!" says Synchrony bank, when Spider-Man is famously not well off, and frequently lives paycheck to paycheck. Save like a hero, obviously, means "protect our interests over your own." It would have been so easy to put a security guard in the bank, give Spider-Man a human interest to protect, but no: he wants to fight "bigger crime." The risk here is money, which is understandable when this movie at every possible opportunity chose to cater the interests of its advertisers over telling a meaningful story.

This lack of human life at stake carries over into the movie's big final battle, too, when Peter attempts to recover Tony's stolen artifact collection from the Vulture. I'm calling it officially: no more airplane scenes in Spider-Man movies. I've long criticized The Amazing Spider-Man 2's addition of the airplane in its big Electro battle, but at least that scene served a purpose by showing the audience that the sacrifices Spider-Man makes save human lives beyond even his comprehension. When the Vulture hijacks Iron Man's high tech stealth jet, the plane is totally automated. There isn't even a pilot for Spider-Man to save, only things. Important things? Yes. Dangerous things? In the wrong hands, definitely. But still: just things. Inanimate objects. Are you really telling me audiences would prefer seeing Spider-Man save Captain America's shield to him saving a life? And if that's true, what does that say about us, the audience? Are we that hollow now?

Like the scene in the bank, I also find it extremely unlikely that no one was hurt when that plane crashed on the beach. A beach at night is often populated by homeless people looking for a place to sleep. But, like Peter in 90% of this movie, any concern for actual people is swept under the rug in favor of looking cool, so huge fiery beach crash it is.

His friends are at stake in DC and people are in danger on the ferry. These are both scenes where human lives are at risk. However, neither of these things would have happened if Peter hadn't been so concerned with proving himself worthy of being an Avenger – in fact, everything would have been fine if not for his direct interference, so I have a hard time like, sympathizing with him there, even if he does allegedly Feel Bad. But does he? Does he feel genuine remorse, or is he just crushed that his Cool Supersuit has been taken away, like a child being chastised after he dinged the car by having the keys rescinded. “Without this suit, I'm nothing,” he whines, as if without that suit he could not bend steel with his bare hands. Does he understand the weight of his actions, truly? The big cool final battle where he saves a bunch of Iron Man's stuff and is then rewarded with his Cool Suit and Adult Recognition tells me, no.

Product Placement: I don't want to say I don't like product placement as a rule, because I think there is potential, just as there is with almost anything, to do it well, to blend it seamlessly with the film's surroundings, and product placement is often a necessary evil. Not in any Disney-owned film, obviously – product placement in any Disney-owned film is corporate greed at its finest. On the other hand, advertising as an art is dead and Homecoming is a perfect testament to that. The advertisements in Homecoming aren't inserted into the movie, no – the movie is built around the ads.

I have literally never seen a franchise where the ads are more bafflingly antithetical to its main character than in Spider-Man: Homecoming. Is there anything in the world that screams “Peter Parker” less than German automobiles, expensive gaming laptops, and an actual bank? Look, I don't mind putting Chris Pratt's face on a bag of Doritos. That's normal. But there's a Dell commercial advertising that you can see their computer in action “in Spider-Man: Homecoming” as if anyone goes to a movie to see a laptop? The implication is that you, the viewer, want so badly to either be Peter Parker or be Peter Parker's friend that you would let that influence what laptop you buy, and that in fact you SHOULD let that influence your decision. Spider-Man's first big fight in Homecoming involves him standing in front of a poster for a real world bank. The bank ran an ad campaign telling people to Save Like a Hero, as if Peter Parker isn't widely known for living paycheck to paycheck and frequently having to scrape together to make ends meet. No, MCU Peter Parker is a good middle class white boy with a savings account. He doesn't worry about money and neither should you, the person who shelled out \$15 or more to watch a two hour commercial disguised as a superhero film.

synchrony
BANK

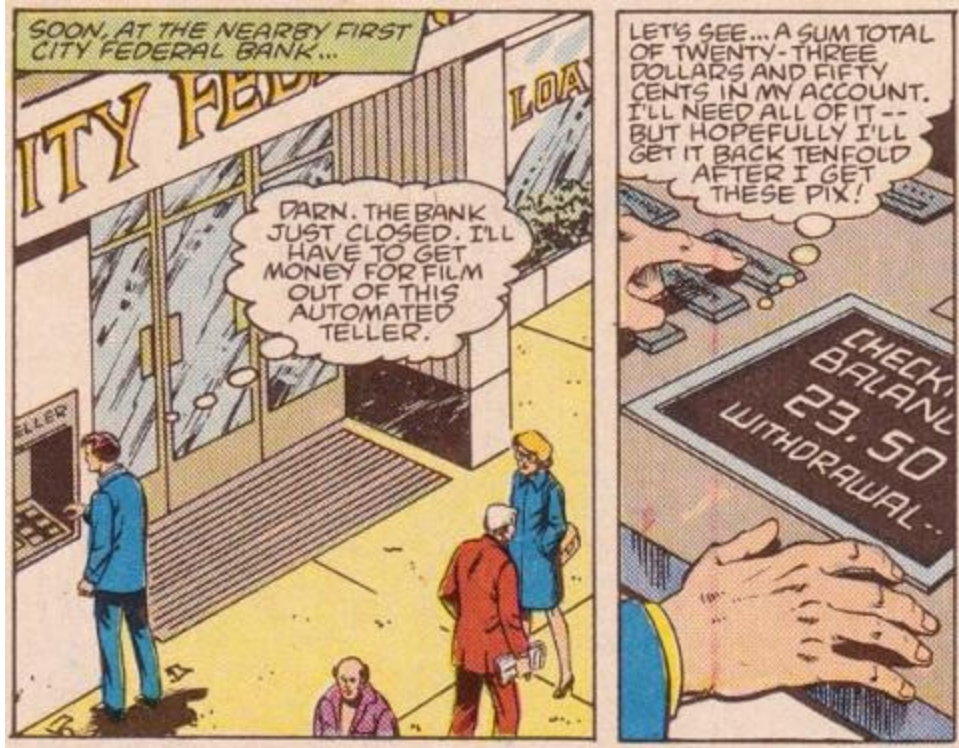
SAVE LIKE A HERO™
**LOOKING FOR
GREAT SAVINGS
RATES?**

MARVEL STUDIOS
SPIDER-MAN
Homecoming
7.7.17

Watch Now

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The advertisement features a full-body image of Spider-Man in his red and blue suit, standing with his arms crossed against a dark blue background. The Synchrony Bank logo is in the top left, and the Spider-Man Homecoming movie title and release date are in the bottom left. A yellow 'Watch Now' button is centered below the movie title.



Save like Spider-Man? Yeah, thanks, I'll pass.

There is a literal Audi commercial at the end of the movie. I had to watch Happy Hogan smugly remove his hands from the steering wheel to demonstrate Audi's new hands-free driving technology, like this was supposed to impress me in a movie where a man who built himself a bird-themed jetpack suit was dealing alien ray gun weapons. In a previous film, a self-aware robot launched a small European country into the SKY, and advertisers think Jon Favreau going "no hands!" is more important than taking that ten seconds to establish anything about Peter Parker. That's how incredibly greedy and out of touch the industry is.

The Instant Kill Mode: Stay with me on this one, because this -- whether it be intentional or thoughtless -- is very disturbing to me. Spider-Man doesn't kill, right? That's his thing. That's what he's known for. And while I think this cultural perception of him is actually a warped ideal -- he's perceived as far less violent than he actually is in the comics canon, where he regularly goes out on patrol (or, to label it more accurately, he goes out hunting) for crime, which he will then stop. Violently. With his fists.

Anyway, it's still a valuable message. The preservation of life and all that. The no killing may be more Batman's thing than Spider-Man in all actuality, but it certainly has become associated with Peter Parker as a character, and maybe ultimately that is not a bad thing, even if I'm personally filled with glee every time in the comics when he almost kills someone. He's more human to me personally if he is a person who would kill for his family, but it's a better message to the world if our hero reflects that there is value in a life, even one misspent, and my thoughts on Spider-Man and brutal violence are a post for another day.

This warped image of Peter -- the peaceful hero, the Nice Boy, the eternal baby-faced youth -- carries over into Homecoming. We have Spider-Man, in Washington DC for some godforsaken reason when the typical Spider-Man setting is the most iconic city in the world, in his newly unlocked Cool High Tech Suit, with its soothing female voice saying that "instant kill" mode has been activated, freaking out because he doesn't want to kill the criminals he's been hunting! Of course he doesn't!

I found it so uncomfortable that the movie treated the instant kill line like it expected me to laugh. What we're being told is, look, it's funny, and aw, that nice boy doesn't want to kill anyone! And people did laugh! People in the audience next to me laughed at this, because they were conditioned by the tone employed by the scene to believe that this was funny!

But what was actually written here (though like I'm going to say below: I doubt this was intentional, but instead an unfortunate accident of the militarization of the MCU on the whole) is that Peter is being trained as a child soldier and that in the future he will be expected to torture and kill people, most likely on government order. That is why there are interrogation and "instant kill" modes on the suit. There is *no other reason* why those things would be necessary otherwise.

Like I said, I don't think the INTENT of the movie's half a dozen screenwriters, doubtlessly locked in an underground concrete cell and regularly pelted with Mickey Mouse-shaped snacks, was ever to depict Peter as a child being groomed as a government-sanctioned killer. (Though like I wouldn't have been here for a thoughtful and ultra-violent exploration of that.) I do think the movie has a very strange relationship with both the government and big corporate, and it's not like the military doesn't use the movie industry to advertise itself like, all the damn time. But no, it was played as a joke, and the intent behind it was most likely honestly humorous. My tinfoil hat's not on *that* tight. The problem is that when it's applied to the rest of the movie, the story as a whole it takes on troubling connotations. What's Peter's future with the Avengers when we don't even know what the Avengers look like, post-Captain America: Civil War, or how heavily involved the government is with them now that the Accords are supposedly in place? What's expected of him – not by Tony Stark, I note, but by the people responsible for putting the Avengers together in the first place? Why was so much emphasis placed on the suit when Civil War demonstrated Peter – apparently quite competently – fighting crime on his own, without a high tech suit? Why, when tech on this level exists, would anyone put a live human being in a suit like this?

The suit, which he does not even need, because Peter Parker is really fucking strong. How strong? Comics tell us he's strong enough to kill the Kingpin with one hit:



[What If? Back in Black]

It's not like this strength is absent in MCU Peter, where they could have easily played up something like speed or agility instead! The MCU took the trouble establishing how strong Peter was even without the suit: he caught an SUV without any visible effort and came out unharmed. He managed to hold, even if only for a brief moment, two halves of a passenger ferry together. If that's how strong he is, he is his own instant kill mode. A *true* message about Peter's strength and responsibility, his unwillingness to kill people, should then be about him learning how to manage his own strength. But guess what: that's not fun. So it's jokes about government-sanctioned murder instead! Good times.

There could have been a good message in this movie: when Peter eschews the suit and the Avengers position at the end in favor of Queens, it could be about him truly realizing he does not need outside intervention to be Spider-Man, that his powers are his own and he can choose to use them for the right reasons, for the people who need his protection and not on the whims of a government agency. But when Tony gives him a suit back at the end – a suit with, presumably, all these things still included – it shows us that that is not, in fact, what is happening. (None of this is a criticism of Iron Man, I want to be clear. His character is as much a pawn as Peter's is, moved at the whims of the plot instead of informing it. It's hard to criticize a character's actions when all that exists behind them is "this happened so the plot could move forward." I'll leave discussions on Tony in this movie to the Iron Man scholars.)

I've always felt the MCU's quest to make itself a "realistic" superhero brand -- one that looks and feels like it's really happening out in our world -- becomes troubling once you start attempting to tackle concepts like culpability and the questions Civil War asked (and frankly failed to answer). That's never been more apparent to me than in Spider-Man: Homecoming. For all the talk of how this is "the first Peter Parker" movie, Peter Parker has no power in it. There is only faceless, corporate Spider-Man, ready to be used for the agenda of others.

Karen, the Amazing Alexa: I do not even fucking know where to start with this one. I am literally struck speechless with bewildered fury. The suit, already way more of a focus than it should have been when Peter's powers, unlike Iron Man's, have NOTHING to do with what he is wearing, talked. The suit talked. It talked A LOT, actually – or she did, I should say, given that the voice is a soothing, lilting female tone, which does nothing but flatter Peter and play to his ego, urging him to do things like kiss the pretty girl he just saved from the NEAR DEATH EXPERIENCE HE INFLICTED ON HER, in a callback to an iconic scene from the first Raimi film that felt unearned. (My mother's commentary on this scene is different: she felt that by saving Liz from danger inflicted on her as a result of his being Spider-Man, it pre-emptively erased the weight of his part in Gwen Stacy's death. So the movie doesn't just remove his responsibility for past/current events, it actively erases the guilt of previous iterations of Peter Parker too, because look, it's fine, he saved her! I'm not sure I 100% agree, but I thought it was an interesting line of thought, especially with how brutal TASM2's death scene was.)

Let me not mince words: a disembodied lady voice computer program has, I'm fairly positive, more lines in this movie than any one female character. I don't have anything more to say about this other than: that's fucked up.

The Female Agenda:

So let's get one thing established right off the bat: Women don't get to do anything in this movie. Not really. Nothing that *matters*, a spectacularly odd thing when Spider-Man has always been filled with interesting, layered female characters who motivate and support Peter while simultaneously having lives and goals outside of him. Contrasting Homecoming again to the first Amazing Spider-Man film, Gwen Stacy is who kept New York from being turned into lizards. She's the one who braved Oscorp and made the antidote. And then, when she finished, and Peter ordered her to leave, she declared that she was getting everybody out and hung up on him. Gwen got to be a hero in that movie, too. In the Raimi Spider-Man films, Mary Jane has a life that exists outside of Peter. She has her own goals and aspirations that have nothing to do with him. She exists outside of him.

Liz, one half of the original Spider-Man love triangle, never gets that. Liz doesn't even get to confront her own father – the film's main villain – over his actions, which he claims to have done all in her best interest, to give her a better life. Wouldn't it have been much more powerful to let her be the person who pulls the rug out from under his criminal empire? To be the one who says "this is wrong"? To even have a hand in that, a voice? To have any agency in her storyline, at all? Liz doesn't even get to tell Peter *she* likes him, no – she only says that she knows *he* likes her. It's implied, of course, by the Movie Rules, that she must like him back, because he is the Main Character, and she is The Girl, and she looked at him that one time and the camera lingered, but why on Earth would she ever agree to go out with this guy? Maybe at the beginning of the film, sure, but then she invites him to her party and he leaves. He quits the decathlon team at a terrible moment, then rejoins last second only to ditch them again at the decathlon. Liz repeatedly asks Peter to spend time with her: to go to her party, to go swimming with her, to watch videos with her in the car, and he rejects her in favor of pointless superhero endeavors that needlessly endanger the people around him and that will ultimately take her loving, if criminal, father away from her. For all that it claims he likes her, he treats her like dirt. ("But he was being Spider-Man!" listen, being a teen vigilante isn't an excuse to ignore the people in your life. There's an entire Web of Spider-Man scene about this.) The movie doesn't even let Liz be a real love interest – this is, after all, the first Spider-Man movie without a kiss scene. At the end of the film, she's quietly removed from the picture, shipped off out of New York, tearfully saying she hopes things work out for him or whatever. Her last appearance is used so the film can absolve Peter Parker from the weight of this too. Liz Allan Deserved Better.

Betty Brant is another favorite Spider-Man character of mine – she's present in the movie as a classmate and Liz's best friend, with a tip of the hat to Betty's future career as a reporter, one of the few nods to actual Spider-Man canon present in the movie. However, she has no

relationship or connection with Peter, which is odd when she is the *other* half of the original Spider-Man love triangle, and when she has endured in Spider-Man canon for over 50 years as Peter's close friend and confidant, the woman who calls him her best friend, the woman he eagerly sets time aside to watch movies with, someone who he loves and protects and values and who does the same for him. The woman who would go on to marry and later be terrorized by 616's Ned Leeds. Homecoming's Betty doesn't have her typical brunette bob haircut, which is fine until you realize that the actress, whose long blonde hair was left untouched and undyed, sports a black headband in the movie. Long blonde hair + a black headband is the *iconic* hairstyle sported by Gwen Stacy during The Night Gwen Stacy Died. The hairstyle that has become associated with Gwen Stacy, period. Why? Why do that? Why not save the ten bucks and *not* put a headband on her, instead of stealing the image of one of Spider-Man's most famous characters and making a chimaera out of Betty, taking her from an important character in her own right and visually transforming her into Gwetty Stant? Why is not one single female character, with the possible exception of Liz (her villainous father might have been a nod to the character's Ultimate background), allowed to be herself?

And then there's Cindy, credited by one name like Cher, played by Tiffany Espensen to great adorability, who you're obviously *supposed* to realize is Cindy Moon, the girl who was bitten by the same spider as Peter, wink wink, nudge nudge, don't you feel rewarded for reading a comic. But by not listing her by a full name and not *doing* anything with her, they remove the responsibility that they might one day have to hatch this Easter egg and actually have an Asian superheroine with the same powers as beloved male power fantasy Peter Parker. It would have been so easy to do an after credits scene where Cindy's mother cracks her daughter's bedroom door to find her room covered in spiderwebs, but no, instead we got a bland prison scene unveiling yet another man and a Captain America joke I can only describe as the stinger equivalent of nails on a chalkboard. Spider-Man: Homecoming has made it very clear: this is a man's world, baby. Us girls are only here to be defined by men: nephews, fathers, dudes who ditch us on a date because they've got more important things to do, you understand, don't you, honey. I'm not saying that there aren't plans for Betty or Cindy in the future, but I am saying that they certainly didn't imply that there are.

Michelle is another character I liked in the movie. I thought she had a lot of presence despite her extremely limited screen time. It's that limited screen time that leads to a problem for me, though: why address her by name before the MJ reveal at all? She's not in the movie enough to justify repeatedly calling her Michelle, only to turn around last minute and – JACKPOT -- reveal her nickname is MJ, a scene broadcast loud and clear by the posters welcoming back "the Tigers" and the striped mascot running down the hall. I liked Michelle, the weird loner who sits in detention to draw people, who wants to get in some light protesting, and who calls out Ned and Peter for being creepy towards Liz. (Not that the movie itself acknowledges that Peter should be anything but rewarded for staring at Liz, as it later establishes all a dude has to do to get the popular senior girl to go to the dance with him is Positively Nothing.) I would have also loved a Mary Jane that did these things – Mary Jane Watson, the self-titled original female chauvinist, who insisted on carrying Peter's books and opening doors for him. And, if what later interviews

have said is true, and Michelle was never intended to be Mary Jane, why call her MJ at all? What's the point? Why tease the audience like that, with the tiger mascot running through the hall seconds before Michelle says her friends call her MJ? I mean, I feel like at this point I could go through the movie frame by frame and say "what is the actual point of this" but none more so than right here. Was the backlash when it was revealed (and then later rescinded) that Zendaya was playing Mary Jane simply too much for Disney? Are they so afraid of men on twitter frothing about the paper and ink woman they project on no longer being white that they hastily rewrote it so haha! She's MJ but she's not Mary Jane! That's right, we can have it both ways! This is our cake AND we're eating it! You're cool, racists! (You're not cool, racists.)

Female characters should not be viewed as interchangeable. By saddling Michelle with the MJ nickname last minute, accompanied by a nod to Mary Jane's signature tiger, we've stripped Michelle of the ability to be her own character – she'll always be in Mary Jane's shadow, but she'll never be Mary Jane. Likewise, any future MCU Mary Jane has now had her nickname taken away from her. *She* can never be MJ, having had that piece of her identity pasted onto a supposedly original to the film character. It's a pointless disrespect to both fans of both Mary Jane Watson and the new Michelle character, and only serves to underline how women serve in this movie as nothing but window dressing.

Did You Know May's Hot Now?: Ohhhh my god, men of the movie, please stop telling me about how May is hot now. I know Marisa Tomei is hot! I have eyes! What kind of curse is laid upon the MCU's land that every man above the age of eighteen is instantly struck down by Marisa Tomei's radiant visage and cool aunt wardrobe? What does Hot May do to afford that apartment, with its new expensive fridge, and Peter's endless replacement backpacks? (What Was The Point Of The Scene Where He Stupidly Loses His Backpack. Was it just to establish that day-to-day financials aren't a concern for these Parkers?) We don't know! We don't even know if she was ever married to Ben Parker – Peter mentions that she's "been through" some things, but for all the movie cares it could have been a near run-in with the IRS after her twenty-year tax evasion stint. Certainly the movie never takes a single step to show us that she's suffered any sort of trauma, just lets Peter point it out before they hop on over for Thai, where again, screen time is taken away from anything of consequence to remind the audience that Marisa's Bod Is Rockin'. (This is not a criticism of Marisa Tomei's rockin' bod. You go, Marisa. Men of the movie -- you stop.)

We don't know anything about her other than men find her attractive and she, somehow, has custody of Peter, not that it matters when Tony Stark is fully set to reveal him as the latest Avenger without a by-your-leave from his supposed parental figure. What horrible crime did she commit against a witch years ago to have her so cursed, that everywhere she goes men point and go, "That's one hot aunt, fellows," and nothing else? I do not understand the point of this! I know I have said that so many times in this already, but really, why does everything in this movie exist for no discernable reason! Why strip not only Spider-Man's personality, powers, sense of agency, his battle for selflessness – but his aunt's personality as well? Does she exist to give the older men in the audience ogling fictional high school girls plausible deniability? (Laura

Harrier, I should note, is in her late 20s, but the character she plays is not.) After all, Marisa Tomei reportedly wanted to go grey for the role and was denied, presumably to preserve the Hotness. “No, sir,” the perverts can say, “my over-18 eyes were fixed firmly on Ms. May Parker’s charmingly oversized glasses! I’d love to run into that in the Target home goods section, rawr.”

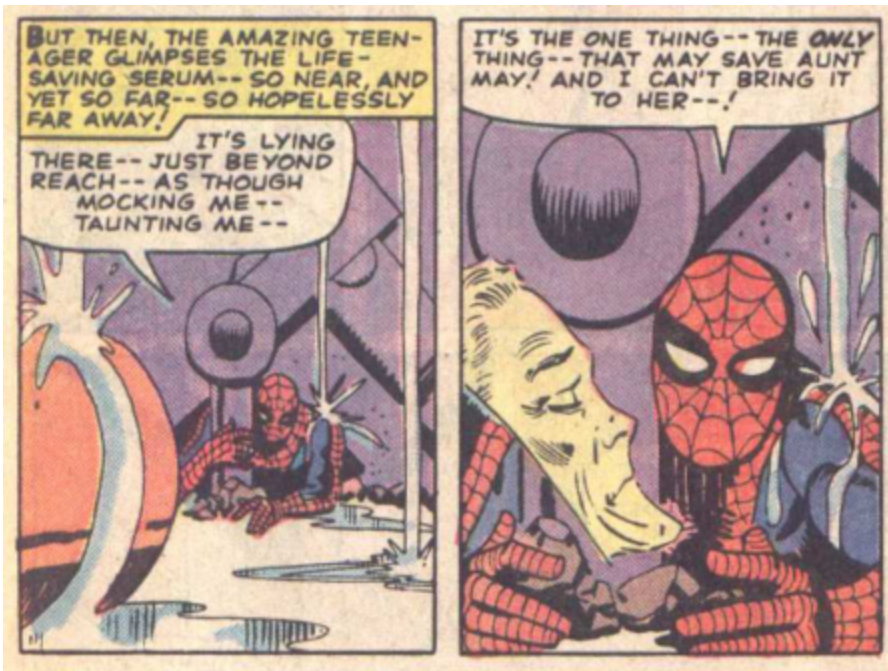
Or was their cheeky joke – she’s usually old but now she’s Young, Fun, and Flirty! – the entire purpose, and if so, what a weird thing to do, to take a character and age her down just to wink and nudge at the audience, oh haha, isn’t it great that Aunt May’s hot now? Isn’t that funny because, you know, she’s usually old? And the answer is no, obviously, it’s not funny. Because May should be an important character to Peter, a symbol of what he fights for, even if she’s 108 and the most hideous old bird at the nursing home. Because it’s weird to take a nuanced, layered character and an important piece of the Spider-Man mythos and hang her new worth on being attractive to men. Because a woman of any age is worth more than that.

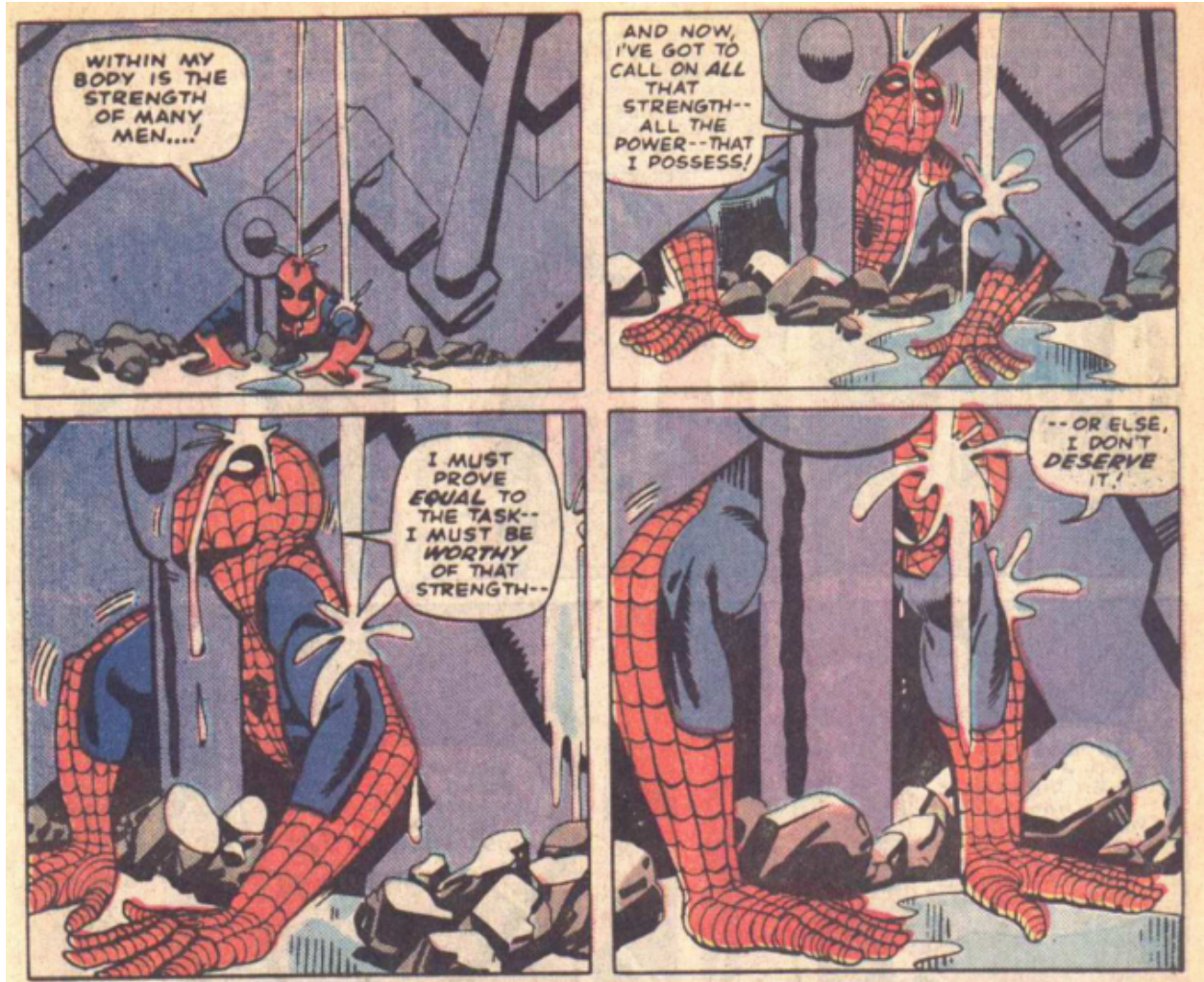
The Amazing Spider-Man #33: On the subject of Aunt May, let’s talk about the homage paid to Amazing Spider-Man #33, and why it actively offended me. Like mouthing “what the fuck” in the theater, actively offended.

I know this is a moment a lot of people liked – Peter, pinned under the concrete, finally realizing the painful side of being a Cool Superhero, panicking and crying out. I didn’t care for it because that kind of whump isn’t where my interests are at with Spider-Man, but then I’m not Train “Unpopular Spider-Man Opinions” Cat for nothing. Also because at that point I was vividly fantasizing about him being crushed so the movie could end already and I could leave. Anyway, it’s a big humanizing moment or whatever.

It’s also a recreation of an iconic scene from Amazing Spider-Man #33, where Peter, trapped underneath some wreckage, finds the willpower to break free and save the day. It’s instantly recognizable if you’re familiar with the comic -- they really did do a nice job with the initial visual, if I must credit them for one thing. But in Amazing Spider-Man #33, it’s the thought of Aunt May – whose life is forfeit if Peter should perish under the rubble – giving him the strength to do the seemingly impossible. In Homecoming, RDJ’s voice Mufasa’s along out of nowhere and as a result Peter Finds His Inner Strength. So it’s not just that Ben Parker was erased from the narrative – May, the woman Peter Parker considers his mother, was effectively erased. An important moment demonstrating Peter’s incredible love for her was retooled in favor of his frankly uneven and inherently merchandisable connection to Iron Man. Spider-Man, a character who is as equally defined by his love for Aunt May as he is by his grief over Uncle Ben, had his mother figure’s importance taken away to shine a big spotlight on this mentor/student relationship meant to sell yet more tickets to people who gleefully throw Peter’s actual parents out of the window in order to play house with the Avengers. Which if that’s your thing, that’s fine! Have fun! Do your own thing! But don’t pretend the movie didn’t capitalize off the emotional effort that fans put into creating the idea that Tony and Peter have a genuine father-son dynamic. The fans did all the work setting that up with cute tumblr posts and adorable fanart; the

MCU only profited off it, and now, because that's Popular, Aunt May has been replaced in all but Sexy Lamp image.





*"I must be **worthy** of that -- or else I don't **deserve** it!"* What an incredible slap in the face to the original scene, here in this movie where Spider-Man protects corporate interest and finds no inspiration in the love of his parents, Ben and May Parker.

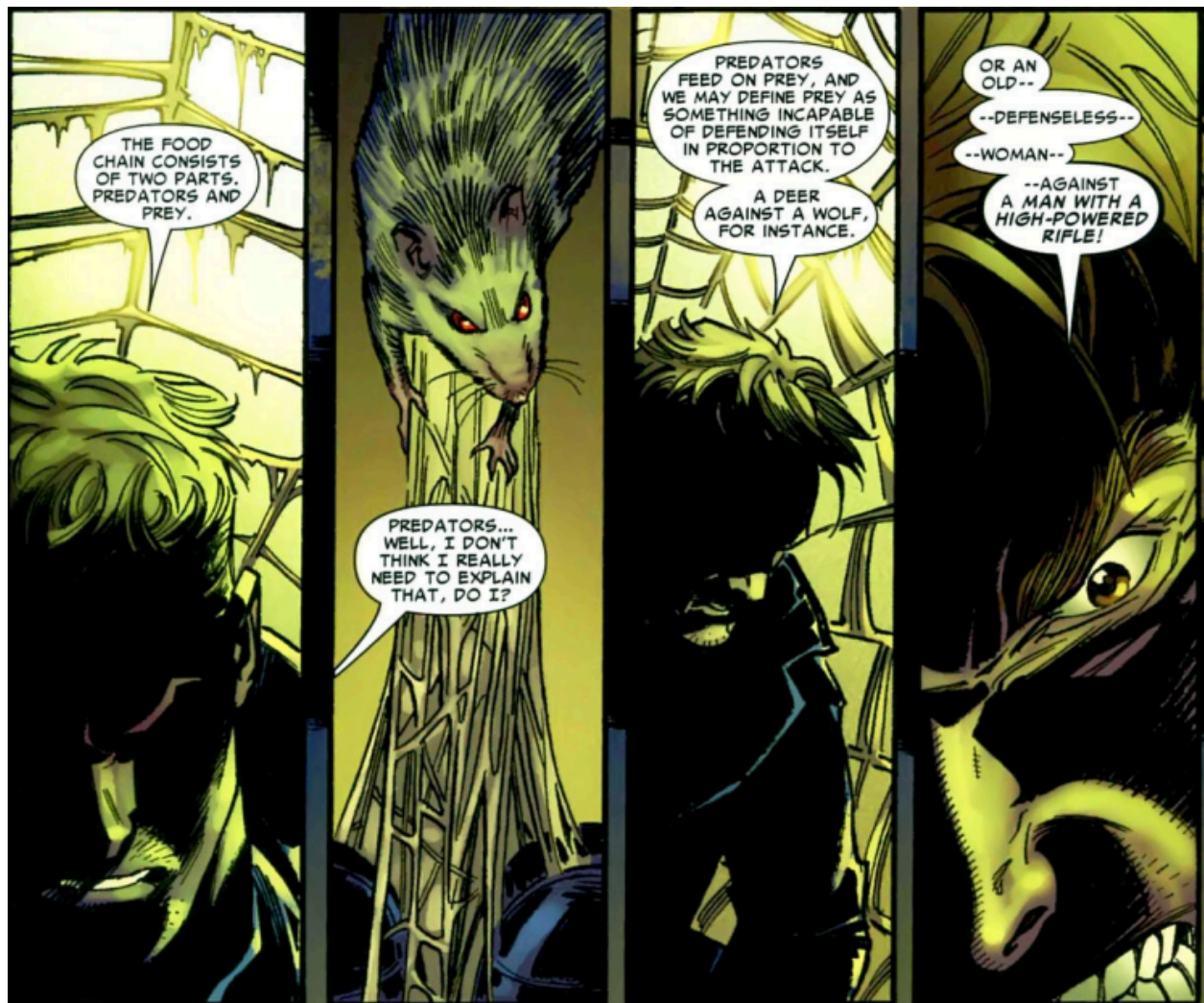
Ben Parker Must Die: Let me use this movie to illustrate why I HATE every heavily retweeted and reblogged pithy post about how we've seen Uncle Ben die 80,000 times and we don't need to see it again. Okay, so we don't want to rehash Ben's death – that's fair, most everyone who is familiar with Spider-Man knows he has an Uncle Ben who raised him and taught him that with great power comes great responsibility and who then died tragically. Fine, it's a movie, it's what, two hours total, so every minute counts. Not here, obviously, where story and characterization are tossed aside willy nilly to show us another car, but that's the theory, that if the audience already knows a fact, it's fine to move on. And I'm fine with this, in theory. (In practice I don't believe one can TRULY know how Spider-Man will act without the specifics of Ben's death: for example, in *Noir*, the responsibility of his death is not on Peter and he is not killed by a gun. *Noir's* Peter, as it follows, carries and uses guns.)

The problem is that clearly this Peter has not learned any lesson about responsibility. (Nor does he actually learn it at the end the film, either, when that potentially cathartic moment of him picking Queens over the Avengers is ruined by him earnestly glancing over his shoulder and asking if that was a test.) You don't have to show Uncle Ben's death to acknowledge it, but it's also just? Not acknowledged? Like I'm not even sure if this Peter is an orphan, really, or if his loving parents in Iowa have just shipped him off to stay with his single aunt in New York City in an attempt to squash her fun-loving Carrie Bradshaw lifestyle. Did Ben Parker even die? Or is he too like Hot Aunt May and some French billionaire has run off with him? Is that why this Peter is so concerned with moving up in the world, because Uncle Ben occasionally sends him postcards from the Riviera? Everything that "she's been through" is so vague, why not just say "after my uncle died"? By putting the trauma all on May, the movie divorces Peter from it. And – drinking game time – I don't understand why they did it. Civil War gave them the perfect set-up to move on with a Spider-Man story with the "when bad things happen, they happen because of you" line, which I guess still stands, because bad things definitely happen because of Peter in this movie. Not that there are, like, consequences, beyond him briefly losing the cool suit he does not even need. But to throw out Ben's legacy so entirely that he might well have never even existed in this version? That's a slap in the face to the Peter Parker mythos and, effectively, renders this a story about an entirely different character. Speaking of which...

The Attempt to Solve a Problem Like Peter Parker:

So one of the things I think is a big problem with Spider-Man as a Brand is that a lot people who want to like Spider-Man actually don't like Peter Parker. They like the *image* of Spider-Man, the mask and the costume and the feel-good slogans about heroics on colorful birthday cards you can send your 6-year-old nephew. And maybe they like this new cultural perception of Peter Parker: the smart, good boy, the eternal youth, the nice, well-meaning, gentle kid who tries hard – nothing to do with the 50+ years of 616's characterization. Which is fair. I think there's a lot of reasons why Peter as the actual character might not jive with someone. He's frequently sharp-tongued and his instincts are often petty. He makes decisions for other people without consulting them because he feels he knows best. He's protective to a point that occasionally borders on controlling. His guilt isn't something that he, the character, feels needs to be resolved, a concept I think is difficult for people who are not of a culture that jokes constantly about guilt. He's an obnoxious New Yorker. He doesn't play well with others. He's an unsanctioned vigilante who at heart believes his is the real authority. He's aggressive, he's neurotic. 616 Peter works to be as good, as selfless and moral and upstanding, as he is. He *likes* violence; he frequently uses it as an emotional outlet. He *likes* getting into fights – so much that he goes looking for them regularly, he doesn't wait for them to come to him. His anger, when unchecked, is depicted as an ugly thing. Several times I've posted panels of him at his worst, at his angriest, and had people reblog them with things like "I don't like this" in the tags. But that's the point: he's supposed to be a character capable of scaring you, another thing the movie eschews when Aaron Davis, Miles Morales' uncle (because we can have Miles' bff and Miles' uncle, but not Miles) stares him down and tells him he isn't scary. But Peter Parker is.

Peter Parker can be a frightening character. His very kindness is underscored by his ability to inflict violence.



Most importantly, though, and this is his saving grace, the thing that keeps him from the edge: Peter Parker is responsible. And he doesn't want to be anything less. Peter Parker doesn't want things to be easy – he wants them to be right. And I felt like Homecoming took all of that away from him. It stripped all of that from him in the name of mass likability – it wants so hard for you to *like* Peter. Look at him trying! Look at him failing! It expects the audience to want to be an Avenger, so clearly Peter must desire that above all other things, too. To me, this Peter, contained in this movie (and I want to be clear I am talking about the writing and direction, not the actor, people get too caught up on actors), wasn't a character. He was a walking, talking pile of that sweet, sweet Disney merchandising. Of course people liked him – there was nothing to him except the expectation that the audience would self-project so hard they'd magically walk out in a Hot Topic brand Spider-hoodie. There was no responsibility, because who wants to be held responsible for their actions?

Aha, I thought, watching this movie's version of Peter stare out at the wreckage of his neighborhood, caused by his own eagerness in the face of his inexperience. Here it is. Here's the moment he realizes that his actions carry consequence and that he needs to be responsible with them.

It was not the moment where he learned his actions carry consequence and that he has to be responsible with them, actually. No, he just carried on, wreckage to his back. The film shrugs it off, tells the audience, don't worry about it! He doesn't need to feel bad and neither do you. There is almost no scene in this movie where Peter saves a person who wasn't in peril as a result of his actions. Aaron Davis? Peter's phone went off because he forgot to silence it. His friends at the Washington Monument? Maybe if you don't know what a glowing thing used to POWER AN ADVANCED WEAPON does, do not ask your powerless best friend to carry it around! The people on the ferry? He was told not to engage, and he decided to engage.

Someone's groaning as I type this, considering I've already been subtweeted for being a filthy TASM lover, but compare it to this scene the first Amazing Spider-Man movie:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hvACHvnVCbw>

In this moment, Peter's safety doesn't matter to him. His secret identity doesn't matter to him. He doesn't care if he looks cool or impresses anyone else. He doesn't care if he gets hurt. All that matters is that he is in a position to save that child, and he is going to do whatever he has to do it while simultaneously comforting that child. Divorce the rest of the Webb series from your mind if you have to, but this scene, right here: *this* is Spider-Man.

I think in a multiverse characters can be many different things. They can (and perhaps even should) be different from version to version, which if anything makes them ideal to be brought to life by many different writers, directors, actors. We can explore how subtle changes – Uncle Ben dying before Peter's bit by the spider, as he does in Spider-Man Noir for instance, or Peter having a best friend in high school where in 616 comics he had none – would affect the character. Instead of groaning whenever there's a reboot of a superhero movie franchise, we should be excited – *“What are they going to give us this time? What new thing are they going to show us? What new story are they going to tell?”* But there's got to be something in the core of the character that holds true. A kernel of the original iteration of the character, distilled down to their base self. And I think Tom Holland's Peter did this very well in Civil War: the footage of him swinging around the city, saving people. His initial reluctance to leave New York. His anxiety over his aunt's anxiety. *“When the bad things happen, they happen because of you.”* And that's almost my problem with Homecoming's Peter, because Civil War's Peter was so promising. But right off the bat, Homecoming destroyed that for me.

The great thing about Spider-Man is that he is so street level, you know? Yes, he has big supervillain fights and a rogue's gallery, but when he goes out at night, he goes out to stop muggings, to stop attacks on people, on ordinary New Yorkers, on the ordinary civilians of other

cities when he travels. He sacrifices his time and his opportunities and his desires in order to keep other people, people who can't protect themselves, safe. And to feel like, what, he's just doing this now until he's ready for BIGGER things? For BETTER things? That those should matter to him more than people getting home safe? Because that's just kid stuff until you get to the real battles. Know your place, the movie says. Stay in Scouts until you're old enough to join the military. I hate that.

I want a Spider-Man – a Peter Parker -- who cares about more than being a superhero back.

So, final statement: Power and responsibility, right? It's the famous line. Marvel Studios had the power to make a movie with a noble statement: that we must be responsible for each other, that we must be responsible for doing good, that the power to do so exists in the heart of the everyman, even, if we must be so hung up on the notion of Peter Parker as the everyman instead of an incredibly distinct and unique character with a rich and vibrant history. Instead, it shirked that responsibility in favor of a two hour long commercial for Audi, Dell, and Spider-Man, the Brand.

Marvel didn't NEED a Spider-Man movie to bring in the audience. They already HAVE the audience. I wrote this whole seething mess still ready to shell out ticket price for Thor: Ragnarok, Black Panther, and Captain Marvel. (However, I probably will not be seeing Infinity Wars in theaters. Please let me know who dies.) So they wanted to make a movie about a 15-year-old scientific genius. So they wanted to make a movie about a kid who grew up looking at Iron Man, admiring the armor, wanting to be IN that armor. So they wanted to have that kid as Iron Man's apprentice, to put Tony Stark in the role of a mentor. So they wanted a diverse superhero movie.

So they should have made a Riri Williams movie.