

## Marvel Studios Reimagines the MCU in 'What If...?'

Debuting today on Disney+, the studio's first animated series, inspired by their 1977 comic anthology, tantalizes fans with alternate, hypothetical new versions of favorite stories, all observed and discussed in 'Twilight Zone' style by 'The Watcher.'

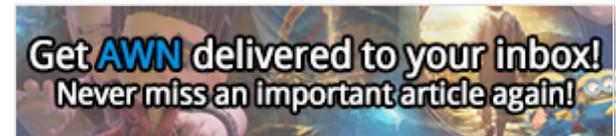
By [Victoria Davis](#) | Wednesday, August 11, 2021 at 7:31am

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Marvel Studios' 'What If...?' debuting today, August 11, 2021 on Disney+. All images © Marvel Studios 2021. All Rights Reserved.

It's the Marvel films we know and love, but, as director Bryan Andrews puts it, with "our own flavor, baby!"



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*What If...?* is Marvel Studios' first ever animated series, inspired by a 1977 Marvel comic anthology of the same name. Directed by Andrews and executive produced by Marvel film production icons Brad Winderbaum and Kevin Feige, the show debuts with its first of nine Season 1 episodes Wednesday, August 11 on Disney+. A second nine-episode season is in development.

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"I hope people tune in and have fun," says A.C. Bradley, head writer on the series, known for her time on *Tales of Arcadia's Trollhunters* and *3Below*. "Our whole goal was to give fans nine pieces of candy with these episodes."

*What If...?* flips the script on the Marvel Cinematic Universe as we know it by reimagining famous events from Marvel films in unexpected ways, all observed by "The Watcher" (Jeffrey Wright). Creating a multiverse of infinite possibilities and infinite episode genres from comedy to drama, *What If...?* features fan-favorite characters, including Peggy Carter, T'Challa, Doctor Strange, Killmonger, Thor and others, with over 50 MCU cast members - such as Hayley Atwell, Samuel L. Jackson, Sean Gunn, and the late, great Chadwick Boseman - reprising their iconic characters.

"We've got super dramatic episodes, fun episodes, and heist episodes," says Andrews. "Being able to do things with a different flavor, I love it, and I love being able to play in that sandbox with Marvel characters."



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With a *Twilight Zone* format, the show launches fans into a world they know, only to turn the tables unexpectedly and show them something new. But Andrews hopes the series will cater to fans in a way not yet explored by the films. “We’ve all talked about ‘What if’ this and ‘What if’ that,

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Maybe come up with a trailer that gives us

and ‘Who would win in a fight between this character and that character?’” says Andrews. “Everyone always does that. We nerd out over this stuff and it's fun. So now, to have a show that actually plays in that playground a little bit, doing some of the stuff that the fans do on the couch at home after the movie is over, it's almost like maybe fans will feel seen.”

Bradley adds, “I've been a huge fan of Marvel for years myself, so to be able to take these iconic moments and shots, that I think all fans like me have burned into their memories, and then finding new twists on them, it's been a dream and a lot of fun.”

While inspired by the original comic, *What If...?* focuses specifically on stories from the Marvel films, such as *Iron Man*, *Doctor Strange*, *Avengers*, *Guardians of the Galaxy*, and *Black Panther*. Likewise, the production team knew the series' art style needed a look separate from the comics.

“Without the comic, we wouldn't be doing this, but the notion of following the comic stories or animated comic stories wasn't really in the equation,” explains Andrews. “So, when it came to the art style, we didn't want to go full [Jack] Kirby. We needed to feel like this was a branch off the cinematic universe, and I felt like we needed to align it somehow with something that was more illustrative.”

While the comics served as their North Star in tone and feel, illustrators like J.C. Leyendecker and Norman Rockwell provided inspiration for *What If...?* head of visual development and character design Ryan Meinerding, along with background designer Armand Serrano and character designer Amelia Vidal.

an idea of the story or else people might not get invested.

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“We borrowed from these great American illustrators from the 20s and 30s for the idealized shape or the glorified image,” says Andrews. “Those Arrow Collar ads from the 20s, it’s like, that guy looks like Steve Rogers. I mean, the way J.C. would draw and paint his men and women was incredible. They look like epic heroes already, and we felt that would be a great hybrid for the show.”

What the team ended up with was bright, highly-detailed CG characters that look like paintings of monumental sculptures, with backgrounds that appear to be straight out of a dream. Or, in the words of Andrews, a “heroic, hyper-realized, super-idealized look.”

But even with these reimaged aesthetics, it’s all recognizable and still familiar.

“The characters are still them,” notes Andrews. “Kevin and Brad look at this no differently than they look at the movies. It’s not some wild thing off in the corner. The attention they bring to this show is the same attention they bring to the movies.”

He continues, “For the shots that were literally exactly the shots in the movie, we are shooting it just like they did to a certain degree, but ours are a bit more abbreviated. And then, once we were done with those scenes, it’s like, ‘Whoop! Now we get to have some fun!’”



And it's been non-stop fun for Bradley, who says it's been extremely difficult keeping their work on the series under wraps for so long. "I was at the *Captain Marvel* premiere and I was talking to [Stephen] McFeely and [Christopher] Markus, who have written some of the best Marvel movies, from *Captain America: Civil War* to *Avengers: Infinity War* and *Endgame*, and since they're in the family I kind of broke my NDA telling them about *What If..?* and this project rebirth," remembers Bradley. "They were like, 'Wait, we're going to see our stuff animated? That's so much fun!'"

She continues, "They loved the fact that we were taking their original stuff and running wild with it. It was nice to know we weren't stepping on their toes, because I really just want to show my love and appreciation for all their hard work."

Andrews says that this opportunity allowed him to summon everything he knew about animation, the MCU, and storytelling and believes that now, because of this series, fans like Bradley can also grow in their appreciation for the Marvel universe.

"Seeing their characters, who are so beloved, doing slightly different things in slightly different ways, it's just more to love and more to enjoy," says Andrews. "I've said it before, but I can't wait for the cosplay. I think people are going to have a blast with this stuff. Really, I think the fans are in good hands. They should relax, pull up their favorite snack and just enjoy."



Victoria Davis is a full-time, freelance journalist and part-time Otaku with an affinity for all things anime. She's reported on numerous stories from activist news to entertainment. Find more about her work at [victoriadavisdepiction.com](http://victoriadavisdepiction.com).

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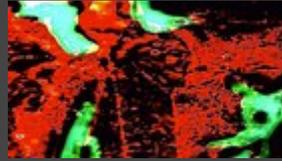
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