MCU | PHASE 1

An as-brief-as-it-can-get summary of all the movies in Phase 1
(Based solely on the MCU, sorry no comic lore included)

© 2026 The Recap Desk. All rights reserved.

THE RECAP DESK

MOVIES IN THE INFINITY SAGA

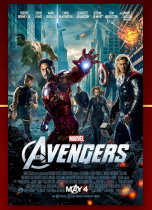












PHASE 1













PHASE 2

PHASE 3



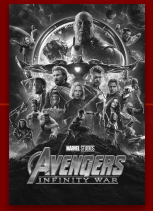








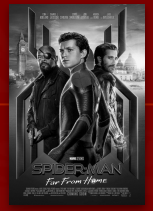














IRON MAN

(2008)

KEY CHARACTERS



Tony Stark
Iron Man



Pepper Potts



Obadiah Stane



Colonel James
"Rhodey" Rhodes



Agent Phil Coulson



Happy Hogan



Agent Nick Fury

BRIEF MOVIE RECAP

TINY SPOILERS

Tony Stark is a mega multi-millionaire, genius inventor, and cocky playboy. He is CEO of Stark Industries, a company founded by his late father Howard Stark, that develops and produces advanced weapons. Following a demonstration in Afghanistan for their new Jericho Missile, the truck he is being transported in is bombed and he is kidnapped by a terrorist organization called the Ten Rings. He wakes up in a cave, with an electromagnet inserted in his chest to prevent the loose shrapnel in Tony's body from reaching his heart. He and his cave roomie Yinsen are under strict instructions to build the Ten Rings a Jericho Missile. Tony upgrades the electromagnet by creating a DIY arc reactor, inspired by the arc reactor powering the Stark Industries facility back home. Under the guise that they are building the missile, Tony and Yinsen actually build an armored suit out of scrap metal, powered by the DIY arc reactor. After three months in captivity, Tony uses the suit to fight himself out. Once free, he is found and returned to the U.S.

Having now experienced the damage the Stark weapons cause, Tony's first order of business back in the U.S. is to announce that Stark Industries will no longer produce weapons. Obadiah Stane, his right-hand man at Stark Industries, is distraught by Tony's decision. Tony's assistant Pepper Potts, tries to keep Tony in check, all the while Tony is hyper-fixated on creating a new and improved armored suit that he can use as a method of protection. He has also upgraded his chest arc reactor to a much more efficient version. Pepper takes the DIY arc reactor and preserves it for him as a memento.

Tony uses his new suit for the first time to pay his captors a visit in Afghanistan and destroy all of their Stark inventory. On this flight, he pops up on the U.S. Government's radar, and his friend Col. Rhodes (Rhodey) gets let in on Tony's secret project - the Iron Man suit. While trying to understand how the Ten Rings came into possession of so much Stark weaponry, Tony finds out Obadiah has continued selling weapons while Tony has been MIA from the company. One of the weapons' continued buyers includes the Ten Rings. Pepper then finds a ransom video from when Tony was in captivity addressed to Obadiah.

ENDING

MAJOR SPOILERS

Turns out Obadiah has been in cahoots with the Ten Rings for some time. He had paid the Ten Rings to kill Tony so Obadiah could become head of Stark Industries. Pepper attains files confirming Obadiah's involvement with the Ten Rings and his blueprints for his version of an Iron Man suit. The Ten Rings present Obadiah with the remnants of the original suit Tony used to escape the cave which Obadiah uses as a base model for his replica.

Obadiah attacks Tony and steals the arc reactor from his chest to power his own suit. Without the reactor, Tony's heart starts to fail but he manages to get a hold of the old DIY arc reactor that Pepper had preserved. He places it back in his chest then goes after Obadiah, who is now equipped with his own armored suit powered by Tony's stolen arc reactor. He defeats Obadiah by obliterating him with the massive Stark Industries arc reactor.

At a press conference following the events with Obadiah, Tony announces to the world "I am Iron Man".

POST CREDIT: Agent Nick Fury, Director of SHIELD, approaches Tony about the Avengers Initiative.

TIDBITS FOR LATER

- Tony Stark has an AI assistant named JARVIS.
- Agent Phil Coulson was seen recruiting Tony for SHIELD following his return from captivity.
- Pepper saved Tony's first arc reactor with the message "Proof that Tony Stark has a heart".



THE INCREDIBLE HULK

(2008)

KEY CHARACTERS



Bruce Banner
The Hulk



Thaddeus Ross



Emil Blonsky
The Abomination



Elizabeth Ross



Dr. Samuel Sterns
(Mr. Blue)

BRIEF MOVIE RECAP

TINY SPOILERS

Scientist Bruce Banner is accidentally exposed to Gamma Radiation while working on an experiment on radiation resistance. The incident causes Banner to transform into the Hulk - a huge, green, aggressive and uncontrollable creature - whenever he becomes angry or stressed. General Thaddeus Ross, who was present during the incident, was hoping to use Banner's original radiation work to create superhumans that may function as weapons.

Banner retreats to Brazil to figure out how to control the Hulk and to find an antidote to get rid of the Gamma in his blood. He has been trialing antidotes on himself with the help of an online pen pal known to him as Mr. Blue. During one of his shifts in a drink-bottling factory, a drop of his blood gets onto one of the bottles and thanks to awful quality management, the infected drink goes out into the world. The consumer of the infected drink dies which then helps Ross track Banner down in Brazil. He hires Emil Blonsky to bring Banner in but they fail, and Banner escapes in Hulk form.

Banner finds Elizabeth Ross - daughter of Thaddeus Ross and fellow scientist who was part of Banner's radiation project. Banner informs her of her father's plans to use the serum as a weapon. In the meantime, Ross administers Blonsky with a low dose of a mystery serum. Ross locates Banner again, and a newly enhanced Blonsky takes on the Hulk. It's not enough though and the Hulk throws the enhanced Blonsky into a tree and breaking almost every bone in his body. On the plus side, the Hulk shows some signs of humanity for the first time ever when he shields Elizabeth from Blonsky's attack.

Blonsky has an unexplainably speedy recovery, which Ross associates to the mystery serum he was administered before. He gets injected with more of the mystery serum to even the playing field with Banner. On the run, Banner meets with Mr. Blue, aka Dr. Samuel Sterns, for the first time and they test an antidote to help Banner suppress the Hulk, which seems to work. Once again Ross and his team locate Banner, this time through his emails to Mr. Blue/Dr. Sterns.

ENDING

MAJOR SPOILERS

Dr. Sterns has been secretly multiplying Banner's blood to not only find an antidote for him but also to potentially use it to cure common diseases. While explaining this to Banner, Ross's team storms into Dr. Sterns' lab and are finally able to arrest Banner. Blonsky convinces Sterns to administer him some of Banner's blood, which combined with the serums already in his system, makes him the monster known as the Abomination.

The Abomination goes on a rampage through Harlem. Banner convinces Ross to release him so he can go after the Abomination. Banner is able to focus the Hulk's attention on fighting the Abomination, who he eventually defeats. After the fight, he runs away leaving Elizabeth and everyone behind. Banner continues to practice his control over the Hulk in a secluded area in British Columbia.

POST CREDIT: Tony Stark approaches Thaddeus Ross, hoping to get information on the Hulk. He informs Ross that he is forming a team - the Avengers.

TIDBITS FOR LATER

- The Gamma Radiation mutation stems from test versions of the 'Super Soldier' Serum.
- Dr. Sterns is exposed to a drop of Banner's blood after Banner gets arrested, and the last we see of Sterns is him mutating.



IRON MAN 2

(2010)

KEY CHARACTERS


Tony Stark
Iron Man


Ivan Vanko


Justin Hammer


Natasha Romanoff
Black Widow


Rhodey *(new actor)*


Pepper Potts


Agent Nick Fury


Happy Hogan

BRIEF MOVIE RECAP

TINY SPOILERS

Now known to the world as Iron Man, Tony Stark is doing the most with this new persona and dealing with the side effects of the arc reactor in his chest. He is experiencing increased palladium toxicity due to the constant use of the Iron Man suit, and is looking for a solution to replace the palladium core in his reactor. He has a new assistant named Natasha Romanoff who later becomes Pepper's assistant when Tony appoints Pepper as the new CEO of Stark Industries. Tony is also trying to prove to everyone that the Iron Man suit is not a weapon, and refuses to hand it over to the Government for replication.

Ivan Vanko, whose father created the original Stark Industries arc reactor with Howard Stark, has produced a version of the arc reactor technology and uses it to power some electric whips. He attacks Tony at the Monaco Grand Prix, leaving everyone stunned that he has been able to produce the arc reactor technology for himself. Ivan is thrown in prison until he escapes with the help of Justin Hammer, CEO of Hammer Industries. Justin wants to manufacture his own Iron Man suit and recruits Ivan to recreate the technology to install in some Iron Man-esque drones that operate with no human inside (Hammerdroids).

Tony goes into existential crisis mode when he realizes the palladium toxicity is getting significantly worse. Drunk and suited up, Tony becomes a slight danger to himself. Rhodey puts on one of Tony's other Iron Man suits, knock him out, and flies away with it. Rhodey takes the stolen suit to a military base to study.

Nick Fury and Natasha find Tony, and she reveals to Tony her true identity as the Black Widow. Fury tells Tony his dad was on the brink of creating a new energy source, one that could now potentially replace the palladium in his reactor. After a lot of revisiting his father's past projects, Tony is able to create a new element (Badassium) which he uses to replace the core and power his chest reactor. Ivan calls Tony threatening to kill him at the upcoming Stark Expo.

ENDING

MAJOR SPOILERS

At the Stark Expo, Rhodey debuts an upgraded version of Tony's suit, created by the U.S. Military. During the Hammer Industries presentation at the Stark Expo, Ivan hijacks all the Hammerdroids and Rhodey's newly weaponized suit to go after Tony/Iron Man. Natasha and Happy Hogan go to Hammer Industries to find Ivan. He's gone but they manage to release Rhodey's suit from the hijacking.

Tony and Rhodey team up to defeat the remainder of the Hammerdroids. Ivan appears in his own armoured suit, which Tony and Rhodey shoot down together. Pepper has Justin arrested for conspiring with Ivan.

Tony and Pepper become a thing. Fury asks Tony to reconsider joining the Avengers Initiative after previously turning it down.

POST CREDIT: Agent Phil Coulson arrives in New Mexico to a crater site with Thor's hammer in it.

TIDBITS FOR LATER

- Rhodey keeps his suit and officially becomes known as the War Machine.
- Howard Stark was one of the founders of SHIELD.



THOR

(2011)

KEY CHARACTERS


Thor Odinson


Loki Laufeyson


Odin


Jane Foster


Dr. Erik Selvig


Darcy Lewis


Laufey

BRIEF MOVIE RECAP

TINY SPOILERS

Thor, the God of Thunder and Heir to the Asgardian throne, is ready to become King when suddenly his inauguration ceremony is cut short by Jotunheim Frost Giants who broke in to acquire the Tesseract (a rare and mysterious power source). Out of spite and pure cockiness, Thor goes against his father's (King Odin) orders, and goes to Jotunheim to get his revenge on the Frost Giants. Due to his arrogance and betrayal, Odin strips Thor of his right to the throne and the hammer that holds his powers (Mjolnir). Thor is also immediately banished to Earth.

Thor is found on Earth by astrophysicist Jane Foster and her team - Darcy Lewis and Dr. Erik Selvig. Together Jane and Thor locate Mjolnir on Earth, which Agent Phil Coulson and his SHIELD team are investigating. Thor is unable to lift and take Mjolnir from SHIELDS site as he is still unworthy of its powers.

On Asgard, Thor's brother Loki finds out he is not son of Odin - he is a Frost Giant and son of Laufey. He was taken by Odin as a baby as means of leverage against the Frost Giants. Odin randomly falls into a coma and, in Thor's absence, Loki takes the throne as interim King. Loki appears to Thor to inform him Odin has died, and their mother does not want him to return to Asgard (all of which is a lie). Turns out, Loki has been playing double agent with the Frost Giants, and had helped them get into Asgard on Thor's inauguration day. Loki makes a deal to give them access to Odin's chamber to kill him.

Thor's Asgardian friends go to Earth to find him, and inform Thor his father is actually still alive, just comatose. Loki becomes aware that Thor has been contacted and sends a robot thing to attack them on Earth. Thor and his friends fight the robot thing with no success of killing it. Thor makes a final plea to Loki to take Thor's life in exchange of everyone else's. Loki accepts Thor's sacrifice and prompts the robot thing to bitch slap Thor to near death.

ENDING

MAJOR SPOILERS

Mjolnir presents itself back to the barely conscious Thor, bringing his powers back to him. Thor destroys the robot thing and goes back to Asgard. Before he leaves, Thor forms an alliance with Agent Coulson to protect Earth.

Loki lets the Frost Giants into Asgard again and as they are about to kill Odin, Loki kills Laufey. This was another ploy by Loki to make it appear to the Asgardian court that he was protecting Asgard from the Frost Giants. Thor exposes Loki's deceptive plans, but Loki is ready for his next phase - destroy Jotunheim. Thor stops Loki by demolishing the Bifrost, cutting Asgard off from the Nine Realms including Jotunheim and Earth. Odin awakes from his coma, and rescues Thor and Loki from falling off the broken Bifrost. However, Loki realizes he will never be worthy enough in his father's eyes and let's go, falling into oblivion. A triumphant Thor mourns not only Loki but also that he has lost access to Earth/Jane. She is continuing her research while also searching for Thor.

POST CREDIT: Nick Fury gives Dr. Selvig the Tesseract to figure out how to harness its power. It seems though that Dr. Selvig is under the mind control of Loki…

TIDBITS FOR LATER

- Asgard is a realm (part of the Nine Realms) and only accessible through set portals like the Bifrost.
- The Frost Giants are from Jotunheim.
- Clint Barton (Hawkeye) is one of the guards at the SHIELD site set-up at Mjolnir's crater.



CAPTAIN AMERICA: THE FIRST AVENGER

(2011)

KEY CHARACTERS


Steve Rogers
Captain America


Johann Schmidt
Red Skull


Agent Peggy Carter


Howard Stark


Dr. Zola


Dr. Erskine


Bucky Barnes

BRIEF MOVIE RECAP

TINY SPOILERS

In the 1940s, a young itty bitty Steve Rogers is chosen by scientist Dr. Erskine to serve in the U.S. Army on a secret project. After some intense military training (which Steve powers through despite being the runt of the group), he willingly gets injected with the Super Soldier Serum which makes him taller, stronger, and an overall ideal soldier. The serum was developed by Howard Stark and Dr. Erskine. Dr. Erskine is killed by an undercover HYDRA assassin right after Steve's transformation into Captain America. Without Dr. Erskine, the science behind the serum is lost making Steve too valuable to throw into battle. Despite becoming the ideal soldier through the Super Soldier Serum, Captain America is benched and operates more like a personality hire, starring in army propaganda and used to boost morale. During his time in the military, Steve falls head over heels for Agent Peggy Carter. They kiss once but it's enough for him be obsessed with this girl for literally decades to come.

On the other side of the war is Johann Schmidt, the leader of HYDRA - a Nazi deep science division. Schmidt has administered to himself a non-perfected version of the Super Soldier Serum. The catch with the serum is that it amplifies everything inside you, so good becomes great and bad becomes worse. Hence already evil Schmidt becoming the villain known as the Red Skull. He is convinced he is the Superior Man professed by the Gods. Red Skull and Dr. Zola, a HYDRA scientist, are working on harnessing the energy of the Tesseract to power their advanced weapons in order to achieve world domination.

With the help of Howard Stark, Steve finally jumps into action and goes on a self-appointed mission to find his childhood best friend Sergeant James Buchanan "Bucky" Barnes who has been captured by HYDRA along with the rest of his unit. Steve/Captain America rescues a very disoriented Bucky from a decrepit lab, frees the rest of his unit, and brings them all back to base safe and sound. They rescued unit joins forces with Captain America to end HYDRA and the Red Skull, as a team known as the Howling Commandos. Together they successfully eradicate multiple HYDRA bases.

ENDING

MAJOR SPOILERS

Steve and the team infiltrate a train that carries Dr. Zola and a few of his HYDRA weapons. HYDRA attacks and Bucky falls out of the train to his death. Steve and the remaining Howling Commandos take in Dr. Zola who confesses to the U.S. Army that Schmidt plans to take over the world with weapons of mass destruction powered by the Tesseract. They decipher where the final HYDRA base is located, and Steve goes after the Red Skull.

The Red Skull tries to flee on a jet but Steve catches up to him. Inside, he finds multiple baby jets/nukes that are ready to target specific American cities. Captain America fights the Red Skull, until somehow the Red Skull is zapped up into outer space thanks to the Tesseract, disappearing from Earth forever.

With no way to redirect the armed jet programmed to hit New York, Steve sacrifices himself and crashes the jet into an isolated icy tundra. After a long search for Steve and his jet, he is presumed dead by the world. 70 years later he is found frozen in ice, but still alive. He awakes in a 21st Century New York.

POST CREDIT: Nick Fury approaches Steve Rogers

TIDBITS FOR LATER

- Captain America's shield was made by Howard Stark out of Vibranium.
- It is insinuated that Bucky was being experimented on while he was under HYDRA's capture.
- After Steve's sacrificial plane crash, the Tesseract is found by Howard Stark while they were trying to locate Steve.



THE AVENGERS

(2012)

KEY CHARACTERS


Tony Stark
Iron Man


Steve Rogers
Captain America


Thor


Natasha Romanoff
Black Widow


Bruce Banner
The Hulk
(new actor)


Clint Barton
Hawkeye


Loki


Agent Nick Fury


Agent Maria Hill


Agent Phil Coulson


Dr. Erik Selvig

BRIEF MOVIE RECAP

TINY SPOILERS

The Chitauri alien army is in search of the Tesseract which is known to be on Earth. It is being held at a SHIELD facility where Nick Fury and Dr. Selvig are figuring out how to use its power to produce sustainable energy. Loki (yup he's alive) appears in the lab, having harnessed the power of the Tesseract as a doorway from space to Earth. He has a scepter given to him by the Chitauri which he uses on Clint Barton/Hawkeye and on Dr. Selvig to control their minds. The three of them escape the SHIELD facility with the Tesseract. To get the Tesseract back, Nick Fury rushes to launch the Avengers Initiative.

Agent Phil Coulson and Fury start recruiting the Avengers. What have they been up to? Tony Stark built Stark Tower, a skyscraper in NYC powered by his arc reactor technology; Steve Rogers is avoiding the outside world; and Natasha Romanoff was sent to find Bruce Banner. Later, Steve, Natasha, and Tony find Loki in Germany and detain him. On their way back to the SHIELD base, Thor appears. He is insistent on bringing Loki back to Asgard which the Avengers are against considering Clint and Dr. Selvig are still out in the world with the Tesseract, under Loki's orders. He agrees to comply with the Avengers for the time being. They all go to the isolated SHIELD base where Fury, Banner, Agent Coulson, and Agent Hill are waiting. The Avengers figure out that Loki is trying to create a portal between worlds with the Tesseract, and Natasha learns Loki is also planning on unleashing the Hulk on the otherwise secure SHIELD base. Suspicious of SHIELDs true intents, Tony discovers SHIELD has been trying to use the Tesseract to produce weapons of mass destruction to combat threats posed by superhumans and outer space, not for sustainable energy as promised.

Mind-controlled Clint leads a team to the SHIELD base and attacks. The base falls into chaos. Banner turns into the Hulk and is blown off the base; Loki escapes captivity, kills Agent Coulson, and disappears; and Natasha releases Clint from Loki's mind control. In the wake of the attack and Agent Coulson's death, Fury explains to the group his true desire to implement the Avengers Initiative (bringing together a group of extraordinary people to protect the world) rather than rely on the Tesseract weaponry. Tony, Steve, Thor, Natasha, Clint and Bruce agree to work together to stop Loki.

ENDING

MAJOR SPOILERS

Loki and Dr. Selvig are at Stark Tower, using the power of its arc reactor and the Tesseract to open a portal to space over New York City. The Chitauri army make their way into the city through the portal and the six Avengers assemble for the first time and fight side by side to destroy as many Chitauri troops as possible while they figure out how to close the portal. Cue iconic team shot.

During the fight, Fury is making his plea to the SHIELD council to not engage Phase 2 - releasing nuclear missiles on New York to stop the alien takeover. They go against Fury's wishes and release a missile. Dr. Selvig is found and released from Loki's mind control. He quickly works on shutting down the portal he created. Iron Man grabs the SHIELD missile and flies it through the portal to detonate the Chitauri mothership in space. The portal closes, Tony barely makes it back Earthside, and all the Chitauri army bots on Earth power down.

Thor takes the Tesseract back to Asgard along with Loki as prisoner. Stark Tower becomes the Avengers Tower.

POST CREDIT: First glimpse of Thanos, who is amused by the idea of challenging the Avengers.

TIDBITS FOR LATER

- Loki's scepter is powered by the Mind Stone.
- Years prior, Clint was assigned by SHIELD to kill Natasha but he spared her, turning her life around and making them close friends.
- Loki was given the scepter and access to the Chitauri army by Thanos.

PHASE 1 TAKEAWAYS



Tony Stark is the CEO of Stark Industries, a company that used to create military weapons.

Tony was kidnapped by the Ten Rings, a capture orchestrated by his right-hand man Obadiah Stane.

Tony is being kept alive by the arc reactor in his chest, which also powers the Iron Man suit.



Bruce Banner was exposed to Gamma Radiation while testing it on himself for his project on radiation resistance- creating the Hulk.

The Hulk comes out when Banner is angry or stressed.

Thaddeus Ross wanted to use Banner's work on radiation to create more super humans to use as weapons.



Countless people around the world have been trying to replicate the Iron Man suit.

Tony is adamant that the Iron Man suit is not a weapon and is for protection.

Rhodey took an Iron Man suit for himself and the U.S. Army weaponized it, making Rhodey War Machine.

Tony met Natasha Romanoff for the first time, and he was brought into the Avengers Initiative by her and Fury.



Thor is the Heir to the Asgardian throne.

Thor's powers derive from his hammer, Mjolnir, which only those who are worthy of its powers are able to wield.

Loki is not son of Odin, but a Frost Giant, son of Laufey.

Thor cut off contact with Earth (and Jane) when he destroyed the Bifrost.

Loki "died" after willingly falling into spacial abyss.



Steve Rogers was given the Super Serum to become Captain America during WWII.

HYDRA is a Nazi science division that Steve and his unit worked on taking down.

Steve's best friend Bucky Barnes fell out of a train on their way to fight the Red Skull.

Steve crashed an armed plane and ended up frozen in ice for 70 years.



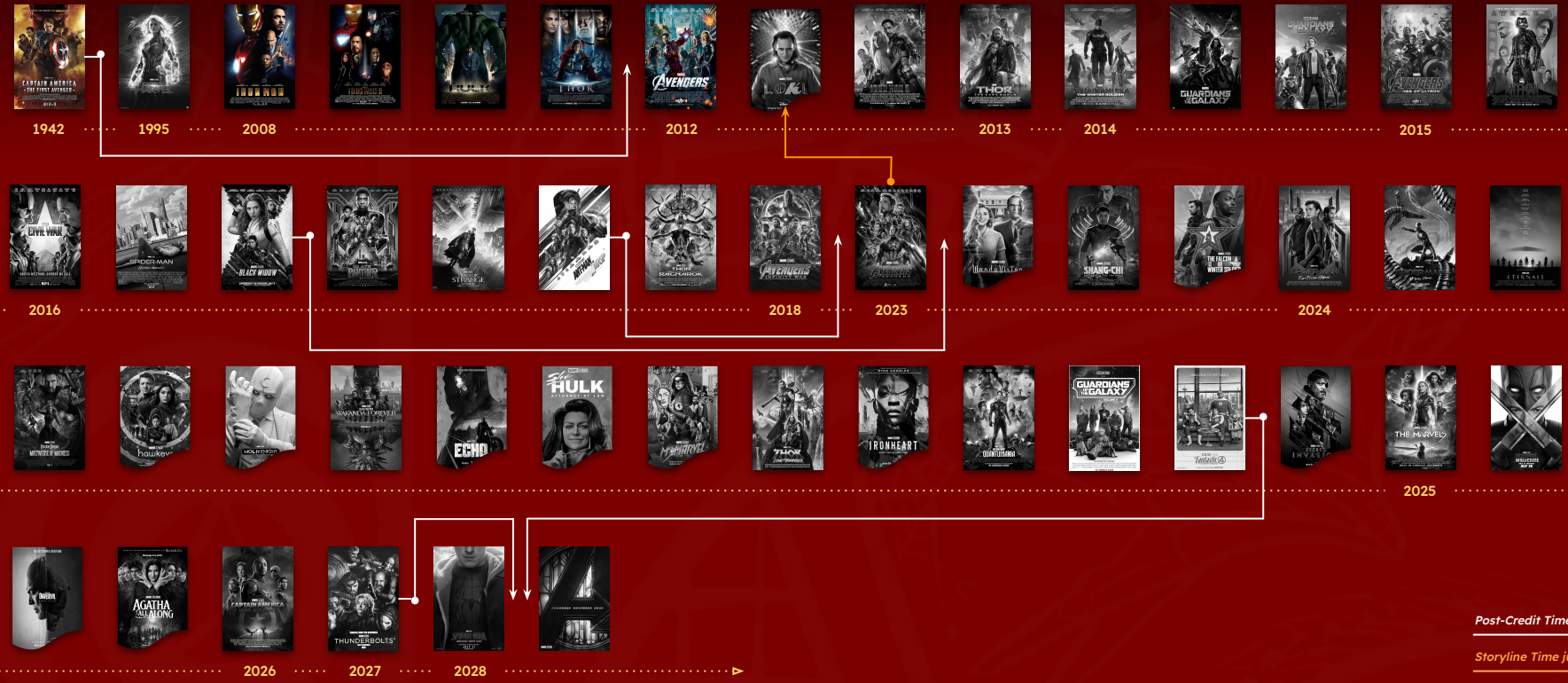
The original six Avengers officially assembled for the first time when Loki came to Earth armed with the Tesseract in search of world domination.

Loki opened a space portal over New York City, which brought the Chitauri alien army into the city, known as the Battle of New York.

Tony almost got stuck in space when he flew the rogue missile through the portal.

Thor returned to Asgard with Loki as prisoner.

PHASE 1 ON THE TIMELINE



© 2026 The Recap Desk. All rights reserved.

This slidedeck is not affiliated with, endorsed by, or sponsored by Marvel Studios, Marvel Entertainment, or The Walt Disney Company. All movie and show titles, characters, and related media are trademarks and copyrights of their respective owners. All summaries, recaps, and written content in this slidedeck are original works created by The Recap Desk and are not reproduced from official Marvel materials.