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THE DECADE-LONG JOURNEY OF AN MCU FAN

SHARF AHMED SAADH

I have been a fan of the Marvel Universe ever since I was a child. A love affair that started with comic books eventually seeped into my TV viewing habits with shows such as Spider-Man, X-Men, and Iron Man on Fox Kids. The live action renaissance in Sam Raimi's Spider-Man trilogy and the X-Men movies during my teenage years were not missed. Even the much criticised Fantastic Four movies. You could say I was growing up with Marvel and our growth has happened in tandem.

I found myself in Kolkata in 2008 when Iron Man, the first instalment of the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU), premiered at the New Empire Cinema Hall. Needless to say, buying a ticket for the premiere of Robert Downey Jr.'s debut as Iron Man felt more like a duty rather than a choice to make. The initial versions of live-action superhero movies weren't as good as they

could be. The limitations of technology in production meant none of these iterations could accurately portray the spectacle of the superhero world of our comic books and cartoons in a live action setting. But Iron Man was a unique experience and watching Iron Man for the first time in the flesh (and suit) was especially a treat for me. Even in my wildest imaginations, I could not expect a performance of this level. Not only did Robert Downey Jr. exceed expectations in playing a complex character like Iron Man, but also added his own spin, giving the character new dimensions. He set the standard for the actors portraying the Avengers in the near future.

When I learned that Chris Evans would play Captain America, I wondered how I would receive an actor who already played a Marvel hero before (Human Torch in Fantastic Four) taking one of the biggest roles in the MCU. In an unlikely turn of event, Chris Evans turned out



to be my favourite of all the Avengers actors. The MCU continued to build its universe with standalone movies for each Avenger around strong, personable actors and actresses. After the first ensemble superhero movie (and the greatest in my opinion), the main cast of Robert Downey Jr., Chris Evans, Scarlett Johansson, Chris Hemsworth, and Mark Ruffalo, the cast seemed like close friends after the revealing of all their backstage antics off-camera on social media and such. It was clear to me I would be a life-long fan. Fortunately, I happened to be in Bangkok and caught the premiere during the first week.

If you were to ask me, Phase Two of the MCU started weak, especially with Iron Man 3 and Thor: The Dark World, but the inclusion of the Russo Brothers in directorial roles with Captain America: The Winter Soldier and the incredibly fun nature of Guardians of the Galaxy quickly made them fan favourites. I wasn't a fan of the

grittier, darker tone the MCU attempted with Avengers: Age of Ultron, but comparatively, Ant-Man was very light and the relationship of the two fathers with their daughters caught my attention more than shrinking technology. By the time Phase Three rolled in with Captain America: Civil War, I felt as if I was watching my close friends fight amongst themselves. The rift between them overshadowed the much awaited debuts of Black Panther and Spider-Man.

With the Bangladesh premiere of the final instalment of the MCU looming, I find it difficult to articulate my feelings. For the past decade, these movies have shaped me. Not only me, but has shaped our popular culture, and by association society, as well. What started with a 19-year old boy in a cinema hall in Kolkata is about to end as a 30-year old in Dhaka. Every journey has an end and I am ready for the Endgame.

LIFE LESSONS FROM INANIMATE OBJECTS



FATIMA JAHAN ENA

We all have different opinions on the activity of shopping. If I were to generalise my own, it would have three staples: children throwing tantrums, mothers being true warriors with their bargaining, and a variety of paraphernalia with incomprehensible mumbo-jumbo written on them.

While the first two may get their fair share of attention, the T-shirts, bags, mugs, notebooks, etc. with mysterious writings on them may be overlooked. Therefore, I took it upon myself to extract whatever lessons I can decipher from them.

In order to begin my noble quest, I decided that I should by reading the sacred texts on T-shirts. Most of the tees I had deemed appropriate seemed to be made for adolescent boys. Thus I had to pretend I was browsing through the T-shirts to find one for my non-existent younger brother in order to save myself from questionable looks. The experience was enlightening.

For example, one T-shirt said something along the lines of "It Is Do Not Do, It Is Strength" in very exciting fonts and colours. Now, there's a lot to unpack here, but from what I gather, it is possibly talking about the strength in taking actions. It is an important lesson because a lot of us may feel complacent in life, but we need to know that there is great strength even in the most of minuscule of actions. A charming thought from a charming T-shirt.

Afterwards, I proceeded to search for meaning in the ceramics department of the shopping mall. Even though I had found many mugs with memorable sayings on them, such as the simplistic genius of the

sentence "I Love America" plastered on a cup, most of them did not hold the eerie and ambiguous sense of knowing that I was searching for. Finally, I found a mug that said "Your here. A smile is the most charming part of a person forever." I could not stop thinking about that writing, even with its possible grammatical error in the first sentence, which filled me with a sense of existential awareness. The second sentence is both grammatically understandable and a piece of truth. A genuine smile will exhibit the good thoughts a person has and will light up a person's face, regardless of how they look.

Finally, I ended my adventure in the world of notebooks. This was by far the most overwhelming bit of my little adventure, as obscure cover art seem to be a prominent feature on most notebooks. Regardless of that, a tiny notebook that showed a cartoon of a girl sitting on strawberries on the cover stuck out to me. Beside the girl and the strawberries, it said "I write an important thing, and do not let's finish, A way of writing for freedom" in the formatting of a haiku. The notebook could be telling us to write for freedom and personal gratification, instead of solely writing for submissions. Writing freely encourages us to hone our skills, of course, but it can prove to be quite therapeutic, as it also lets us be a bit more in tune with our thoughts.

Thus concludes my journey. I encourage anyone reading this to try and find unsolicited advice from objects, too. You never know what piece of wisdom you may find.

Fatima Jahan Ena considers herself to be a chaotically neutral egg with feelings. Fight her at mail2ena@gmail.com