

JESSIE SPOILS EVERYTHING

Across the many adventures, Ant-Man has faced one that has had a resounding impact on shaping the MCU, and his place in it. His first trip to the Quantum Realm, where he shrunk so small he essentially shrunk out of known existence. His latest adventure starts with the issue that, post saving the world in End Game, his ego has become gargantuan. So it is with no small poetic irony that Ant-Man and the Wasp's biggest problem is symbolic on both accounts. Ant-Man getting shrunk out of his own movie and the growing hubris that saw it done.

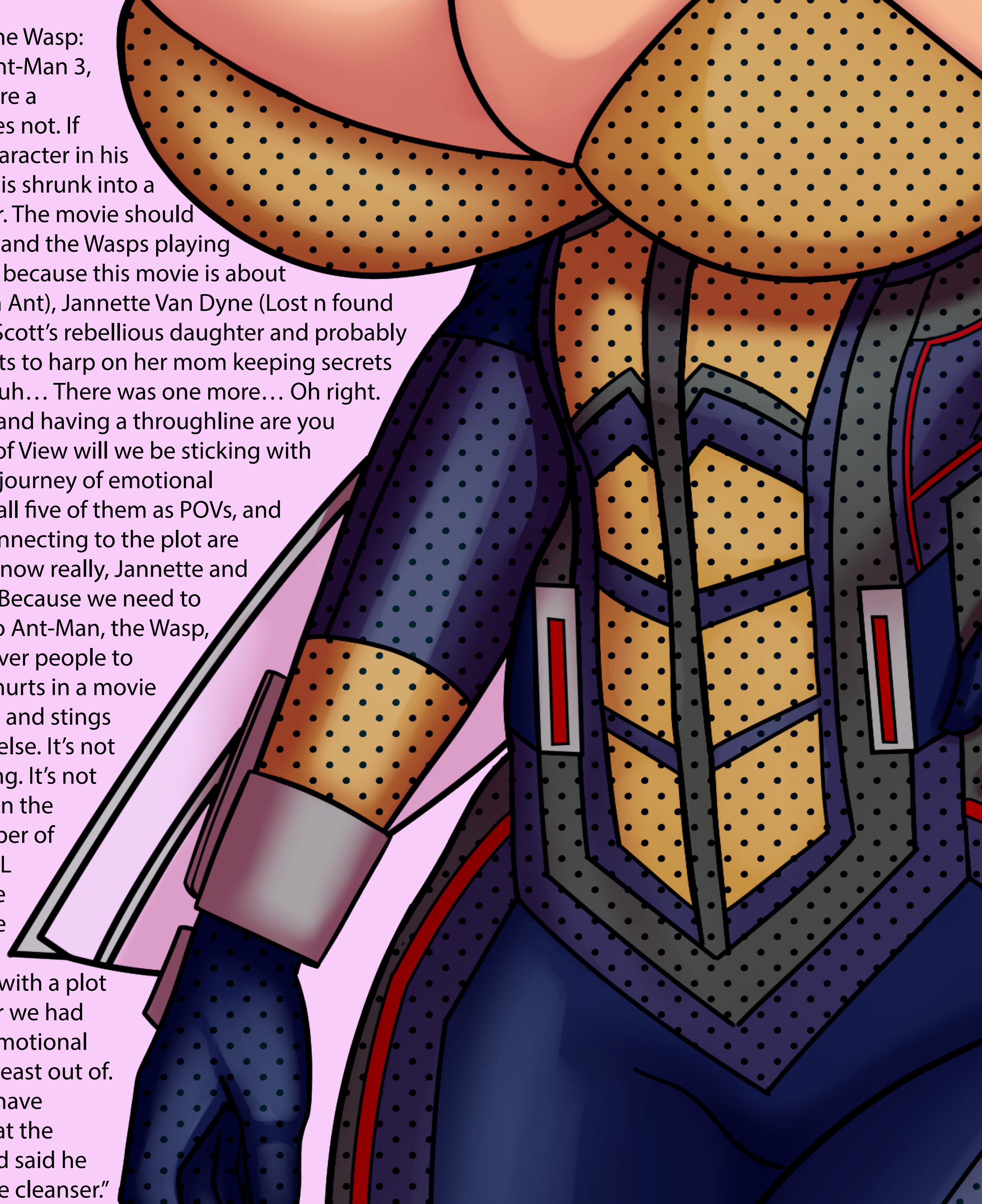
It's no secret there's been a war of ideas at Marvel. While I think people who claim the entire MCU phase 4 to be horrible are exaggerating, it can be said it has been a hit-and-miss time for fans. Thanos is dead. Many of our classic heroes are retired from the franchise. People are claiming they are getting worn out on formula storytelling, and we just seem to be missing the momentum of Phases 3-4. Some of those problems are just challenges in long-form storytelling. How often do shows entering their seventh season seem to have lost the magic because they are just being forced forward by demand instead of genuine stories?

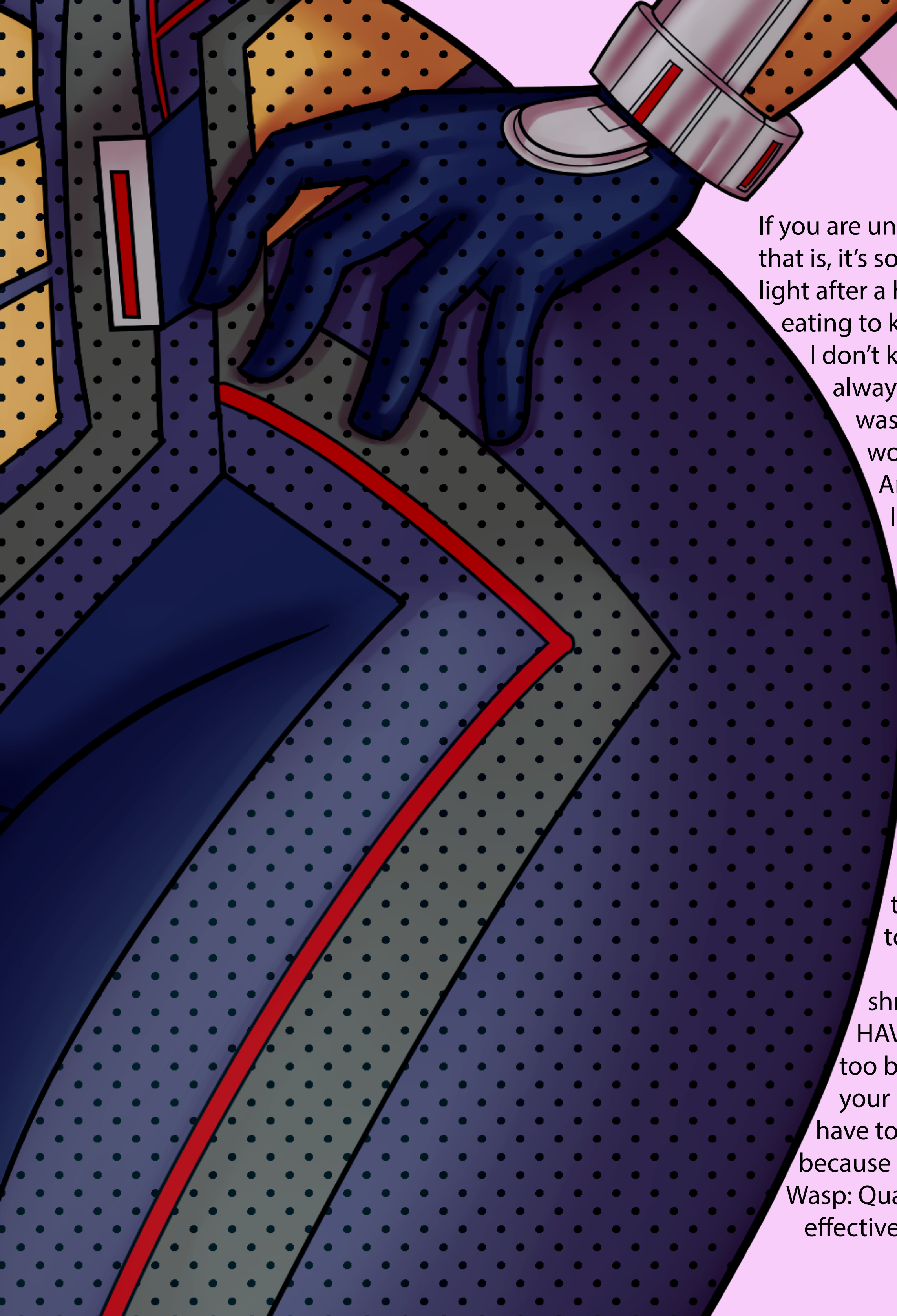
And that is what has happened here. There is a demand to keep the Marvel Machine rolling at all costs by its owner, the House of Mouse, and a big part of why they assume it was popular in the past was the interconnected aspects of serial storytelling. Each movie prepares you for the next in the saga! But when you look at movies that were hugely successful when expected not to be, like Guardians of the Galaxy or, more relevant, Ant-Man 1, it was because even though it had some nods to the greater world, the stories were about the characters and how their contained adventure shaped their journey and gave them growth. In Ant-Man 3, everything is about the chain of events. Everything is about setting up every other movie instead of giving focus to Scott Lang. And the constant drive of hopping from event to event makes any character work feel forced and monkey-wrenched into service the plot and the greater plans for the MCU. And in the process, Ant-Man himself shrinks to a supporting character.



Now its real title is Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania, and I'm referring to it as Ant-Man 3, not because I don't think they should share a team-up. I LOVE the Wasp. This movie does not. If Scott Lang is shrunk into a supporting character in his own film, Hope Van Dyne, AKA the Wasp, is shrunk into a supporting/almost background character. The movie should have been called Ant-Family, or Ant-men and the Wasps playing on the multi-generational Ant teams in it because this movie is about the ENTIRE ant-crew. Hank Pym (Old-man Ant), Jannette Van Dyne (Lost n found Quantum Mommy of Hope) Cassy Lang, Scott's rebellious daughter and probably the future of the franchise, Hope, who gets to harp on her mom keeping secrets and saves the day now and then and... huh... There was one more... Oh right. Ant-Man. See, the issue with storytelling and having a throughline are you often have to choose a POV. Who's Point of View will we be sticking with the most so that the audience is led on a journey of emotional connection? This movie wants to handle all five of them as POVs, and the three that get 70% of the meat for connecting to the plot are Cassy, a character we are just getting to know really, Jannette and her mysterious past, and the third, Kang. Because we need to develop the big bad of the next phase. So Ant-Man, the Wasp, and Old Ant-Man, become plot devices over people to service the other three, which just really hurts in a movie that starts off with Scott Lang as the POV, and stings more and more as we move to everyone else. It's not that the other stories couldn't be engaging. It's not that they didn't HAVE the lines to touch on the emotional character beats for each member of the ant-clan. It's that that is essentially ALL they did. Throw some lines to mark where people are emotionally and jump into the next story sequence. No time to really let anything settle or breathe, and anything with a plot pulled us further away from the character we had invested in. The beginning and end are emotional bookends with the character we got the least out of.

When I try to analyze what could have brought the piece down this road, I look at the director's quotes pre-release. Peyton Reed said he didn't want Ant-Man three to be a "palette cleanser."





If you are unsure what that is, it's something fresh and light after a heavy course when eating to kind of reset the tastebuds.

I don't know if Reed was annoyed his entries always were just reboot/refresh moments or if he was asked to change it up, but I do know saying it would carry the same weight as pieces like Captain America: Civil War is the big hint where things went wrong. I don't think audience investment in Scott was built on big, melodramatic stages, and they wanted to keep his light, goofy side while forcing him to be in a dramatic backdrop. It's a tonal clash. You can't have your cake and eat it too. If the setting gets insanely intense and dramatic, and your characters stay in a goofy slapstick, while neither are bad styles, together they confuse the audience on which it's supposed to be. That heavy addition mostly centers around Kang. They want this villain to have the weight and momentum of Thanos, but while logistically placing him in the quantum realm may have worked, tonally, they never let the Ant-clan accept his dire tone and presence, they stay goofy, and he stays ominous. We're not sure which tone is the one we are supposed to feel.

In the end, we get another rushed, messy marvel, with a shrunken hero presence, for both Scott and Hope (LET US HAVE A GIANT WASP, YOU COWARDS!) but a villain and setting too big for the film's britche. You have to be aware of the tone of your piece because it informs the audience how to feel, and you have to be aware of your hero's journey, struggle, and growth because it gives your audience the WHY they feel it. Ant-man and the Wasp: Quantummania is just too small and too big for a clean, effective story to be told.

Here's hope'n for better
-jess