

WandaVision is an ode to sitcoms



When times are tough, the sitcom is a refuge. Like late-night talk shows, the multicamera sitcom is one of the oldest formats in television. It's affordable and efficient for the people who produce it, and comforting and familiar to viewers. Problems are introduced and solved in 30 minutes or less, usually with the realization that they were never that big of a deal in the first place. Characters have signature tics and catchphrases we love them for; in time, they come to feel like our friends. The best of the bunch are syndicated long enough that we're able to introduce them to our children. What a pleasant thing it is, to retreat into the uncomplicated pleasure of a sitcom – a half-hour white lie to tell ourselves whenever the real world feels like a little too much.

Perhaps this is why *WandaVision*, at least at the start, takes the form of a sitcom. The new series, which premiered its first two episodes on Disney Plus today, is the first Marvel Cinematic Universe TV show made for Disney Plus. It's also the first MCU project following 2019's *Avengers: Endgame*, arriving

after a year without any new MCU installments. As a comeback, it's an odd one: the first image you're greeted with is two Avengers side characters inexplicably being reintroduced as a married couple in the theme song to a black-and-white '50s sitcom. They're driving to their new home, she in a wedding dress, he in a dapper suit, delighted to start their idyllic life together. But something feels off.

The boldness of this play – and the way it is precisely the opposite of what we know Marvel movies to be – makes it a perfect return. It'll be intriguing for super fans curious about what the point is and how it might connect to the larger franchise, and it will be intriguing to those who might feel a little burned out on superheroes.

Marvel projects are gilded genre lilies. They like to pay lip-service to one genre of entertainment – *Ant-Man* has the cadence of a heist movie, for example, and *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* is kind of a conspiracy thriller – while they mostly serve as vehicles for generic action sequences. *WandaVision*, in at least its first two episodes, seems more sincere than that: the first episode plays its conceit of classic sitcom homage almost entirely straight.

As *WandaVision* presents it, Wanda Maximoff and Vision are a married couple who have just moved into a well-to-do suburb. They're trying to fit in while also hiding the fact that he's a robot of sorts and she's got superpowers. In the premiere, this manifests in a very *Bewitched*-esque plot where Vision invites his boss home for dinner without telling Wanda. (She saves the day by using her powers to create an impressive meal without anyone noticing.)

Quietly, however, things get stranger. The ads in the show seem a little off. In the second episode, there's an unremarked-upon time jump; the iconography of the '50s gives way to the fashion of the '60s. There's also no allusion to Maximoff and Vision's career as Avengers or anything they've

been up to in previous Marvel movies. (The show does not mention that Vision, as far as we know, is dead – killed by Thanos at the end of *Avengers: Infinity War* and not brought back to life for *Avengers: Endgame*.)

Slowly, the fantasy starts to crumble. The characters joke about how Wanda and Vision do not have an anniversary or favorite song; and then, more overtly, the show offers glimpses behind the curtain to suggest that Wanda and Vision are being watched or that things that do not belong in this *Pleasantville*-like setting are somehow seeping in. The comics-literate will tell you that there is a good reason for all of the mannered strangeness. The Wanda Maximoff of the comics literature has been known to manipulate reality, and it would make sense that *WandaVision* might be building to that kind of revelation.

But no matter how and when *WandaVision* decides to explain itself, the comics lore of it all is only as good or interesting as the story it's embedded in. *WandaVision* works well enough without too much knowledge of the decade of films preceding it. Fundamentally, you're watching a superhuman couple that's seemingly trapped in a sitcom. It makes even more sense, however, when you recall these characters shared a moment of severe trauma the last time they were together. It makes you wonder if maybe this is where they want to be. Sitcoms are a great place to hide when the world gets to be a little too much.

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