

The Superhero Spin-Off: will a Black Widow solo movie ever be made?

Pim Razenberg on whether a Black Widow movie will ever be made...

Back in October the announcement of Marvel Studios' Phase Three movie slate surprised everyone with the absence of a movie centred on Scarlett Johansson's superspy Natasha Romanov, a.k.a. Black Widow. Long rumoured

since the introduction of Black Widow in **Iron Man 2**, many fans expected the movie to be announced as part of the Marvel Cinematic Universe's third slate of films. But was it really that big a surprise that it didn't happen?



Like Hawkeye, Black Widow was passed over for a spin-off movie in Phase Three, seemingly ruling out the possibility for a solo outing for the foreseeable future. Yet looking at Phase One and Phase Two, the movie's exclusion was not all that strange. This year the Marvel Cinematic Universe will see the release of its eleventh instalment, **Avengers: Age of Ultron**, and while sporting a host of intriguing comic book characters, Marvel has yet to take the

decision to make a spin-off movie based on one of them.

After Nick Fury's cameo in **Iron Man's** stinger in 2008, audiences speculated the possibility of a Nick Fury movie; a movie that was, at one point, thought to come out as part of Marvel's Phase One line-up. As of yet, however, the status of the Nick Fury spin-off is still up in the air. Over the last six years many other spin-off movies

based on the Marvel Cinematic Universe were proposed, but none of them saw the light of day: Black Widow, the Winter Soldier, S.H.I.E.L.D., Hawkeye, Loki and even the Warrior's Three were at one point considered for a solo outing; yet in Phase Three none of these characters

received the greenlight for spinning off into their own adventures. In addition, Mark Ruffalo's Hulk and **Avengers: Age of Ultron's** Scarlett Witch and Quicksilver are equally kept out of the spotlight in Phase Three.



Maybe the reason for Marvel Studios' reluctance to forward a spin-off movie lies within the concept's unstable track-record. After all, previous attempts made by other studios to produce spin-off movies from existing ensemble franchises weren't all that successful. Reception to X-Men spin-off **X-Men Origins: Wolverine** was lukewarm at best and halted the production of the X-Men Origins film series, which among others would have included a movie based on the character of Magneto. **Daredevil** spin-off **Elektra** received generally negative reviews and barely broke even at the Box Office. The **Fantastic Four** spin-off **Silver Surfer** and the **Spider-Man 3** spin-off **Venom** never even materialized.

It seems, however, that other studios hope to change this trend. Both Sony's **The Amazing**

Spider-Man 2 and Warner Bros.' **Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice** were in part set up to serve as a launching pad for the creation of new "cinematic universes". Like **The Amazing Spider-Man 2**, **Batman v Superman** will introduce a host of famous DC characters, cameo-status or otherwise, meant to be spun off into new franchises and spin-off movies set in the same universe.

Marvel Studios plays its cards closer to the chest: rather than shoehorning new characters in its movies and using **The Avengers'** blockbuster status to launch new spin-off movies, the studio has been testing its success with spin-off material in the short movie series **Marvel One Shots** and the ABC television series **Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.** and **Agent Carter**. Meanwhile, characters such as the Hulk and

Black Widow are glorified as "key characters" in their colleagues' franchises. After the announcement of the Phase Three movie slate in October 2014, Kevin Feige defended the exclusion of a **Black Widow** solo movie by stating that her role "throughout the rest of the Avengers saga is very, very big, and lynchpin, in

fact, to those films." A bright light for those who are still hoping to one day see Black Widow take the spotlight is that Marvel Studios' **Agent Carter** is now testing the waters for the production of more female-lead-superhero fare. The series is slowly paving the way for Marvel's female heroes of the future.



Feige's words are key to the discussion that surrounds the status of each of Marvel Studios' proposed spin-offs: rather than stepping back to produce a prequel of sorts based on Black Widow's past, the studio opted "continuing the forward momentum and the continuity of the Cinematic Universe". Marvel's Cinematic Universe was set up as a line of interchanging stories that move each other forward towards a common goal, and a movie based on Black Widow's past would halt the saga's main storyline for quite some time.

For now, it looks like the inclusion of Chadwick Boseman's **Black Panther** in **Captain America: Civil War** promises to be Marvel's first real attempt at making (or rather: planning) a spin-off movie, given that Boseman's character's screen time in **Civil War** will be more than a glorified cameo.

Are you still optimistic about the possibility of a Black Widow movie?

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