Which cinematic universe is leading?

TAMIM BIN ZAKIR

We are living in a golden age of comic book adaptations with more characters making their way to the big screen than ever before. Between Marvel and DC, there are a lot of fights going down off-screen these days. It begs the question, which studio has done it right so far?

At the risk of stating the obvious, Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) is obviously ahead in this game. They have garnered, and rather deserved, much plaudit from critics and fans alike for the manner in which the cinematic universe has developed. The MCU populated by the Avengers, a team of superheroes that includes Captain America, Iron Man, Thor, Hulk, Black Widow, Hawkeye, to name a few, brims with storylines crossing from the big screen to small. The result is a rich, diverse and layered superhero world that gives you a real sense that all of these characters are connected, making it a lot more fun getting involved with.

Unlike Marvel, DC's TV programmes aren't associated with its film universe which goes by the name DC Extended Universe (DCEU). Take Flash for example. Two different actors are playing the same role for TV and the Big Screen. The actor who plays the Flash on TV show (Grant Gustin), for instance, is not the same actor who's the Flash in "Batman v Superman" (Ezra Miller) and the upcoming "Justice League". Things do tend to get more frustrating and baffling for the casual viewers.

With just three movies in, the DC Extended Universe is looking more sombre day by day. Its opener, Zack Snyder's "Man of Steel", was met with mixed reviews and decent box office returns. Not exactly the best foundation for a decade of sequels and spinoffs. Things haven't improved from there either. As "Suicide Squad" opened in

theatres, it clearly couldn't make amends for its gradually falling box office reception. By almost all accounts, including my own, "Suicide Squad" is just average; not too terrible. It demonstrated wit as well as ambition but nothing spectacular. Heck, it even makes "Batman v Superman" look good in comparison as an adaptation solely from comic aesthetic. With each subsequent disappointment, the promise of at least eight more of these DCEU movies develops unease, if not downright anxiety.

Marvel made five movies before it got to assemble The Avengers. They built up each Avenger individually in standalone films before unifying them all together for a world-smashing adventure. In contrast, DC and Warner Bros. skipped right from "Man of Steel" to "Batman v Superman",

which also shoehorned in "Wonder Woman", besides including introductory cameos of the Flash, Cyborg and Aquaman. "Suicide Squad" has even more characters; the entire team plus the Joker. It's so overstuffed with people to introduce that there's barely room in the movie for anything else. Practically the first 30 minutes are nothing but character-describing exposition.

DCEU doesn't have to and frankly shouldn't follow the footsteps of MCU. However, they ought to learn a lesson or two from their competition here. It took Marvel almost a decade of movies to get to the point where Iron Man and Captain America could carry an entire movie with nothing more than a difference of opinion. Forcing Batman and Superman

to battle the very first time they met shortchanged the characters and the potential drama their conflict could have generated later. It takes years to organically build a solid cinematic universe. DC's desperate rush to catch up is evident in their finished products. Their current approach puts the mobile before the bat. Hopefully, a movie like "Wonder Woman", which is focused on just one hero and set decades before the other DCEU movies can reverse that.

There are two things DC does better than Marvel when it comes to comic book adaptations though. They excel at standalone superhero flicks. Warner Bros. provide their directors with ample freedom as filmmakers to create distinctive and more visually textured efforts. Meanwhile, every Marvel movie, despite how good they are, looks exactly the same.

Warner Bros. has a strong track record when it comes to assisting its directors. Just ask "Mad Max: Fury Road" helmer George Miller, who was allowed to make the movie he wanted, no matter how crazy it sounded on paper. This worked wonders in the comic book genre for them with Christopher Nolan's "The Dark Knight" trilogy. But, in Zack Snyder, they're allowing a truly divisive figure who provokes more ire than acclaim to lead and define their DC Extended Universe.

At the moment, it's not working out too well for DC. But I want to believe that Warner Bros.' decision to put their faith in Zack Snyder and other filmmakers will pay dividends and ultimately produce more grandiose productions that are each uniquely special and still merge together to build an expansive universe.

Tamim Bin Zakir aka Shwag_Lord (PSN ID) is an enraged individual who seldom thinks of being generous to others. Feel free to devour his tranquility at niloy.tbz@gmail.com