

Superhero Saturation: The Rise of the Sequel

As a fan of superheroes for some time now, I found myself being surprised at my own indifference to the release of Sony Pictures' *Venom* (2018). My unfiltered response to it releasing seemed to be "Oh, another one". A surprising reaction – but was it really unexpected?

"Oh, another one" seems to define the state of Hollywood right now. Between the steady, well-oiled churning out of superhero movie after movie to the countless live-action remakes and reboots – the feeling of fatigue seems to be natural. The sequel has expanded into the franchise; and the franchise has expanded to "extended universes". Each movie in the sequence is meticulously crafted, chock full of easter eggs, tie-ins and references to the other movies in the franchise. It is, as mentioned earlier, a well-oiled machine.

Earlier this year, we saw one of the best examples of the effect of such a universe, with *Avengers: Infinity War*. Pieced together across multiple movies and multiple, different characters, there was no mercy for those who weren't caught up yet. This was the perfect example of how world building and how calculated movies can get. Movies and franchises are getting only more complexly tied in by the way but the feeling of fatigue I mentioned is still not an uncommon one.

Why?

The complaint of every movie released today being a sequel or a reboot is not an uncommon one. In 2017, there were 47 movie reboots, remakes and sequels – one for every week of the year, almost. There are compiled lists online with titles like "139 sequels currently in the works" containing everything from a *Baby Driver 2* to yet another *X-Men* movie. A trilogy of long, nearly three-hour movies each was got out of *The Hobbit*, a children's book that was barely 300 pages long. Five films are now part of the movie adaptation of *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find them*, one that is not even 150 pages long. Top-grossing movies are now almost always sequels and franchise based movies and entire cinematic universes like Marvel's are already scheduled to release movies until 2020 at the earliest.

So, where are the "Original Movies" – those creative blocks of talent we all complain about missing? Well, here's the interesting (and maybe depressing) answer – they are still around. We just don't see them. Independent and non-franchise based movies are not as easy to hype up. Sequels, franchise, reboots – they all have one thing going for them – the recognisability. Audiences respond to characters they are familiar with, making sequels an extremely safe bet. The original films that do make it out are lost in the loud cacophony that is the sequel. So, it's not that original films aren't coming out – it's that they aren't as loud.

And it's not like sequels are new either. The 80s were chock-full of franchises – from *Star Wars* to *Terminator* to *Die Hard* to *Indiana Jones* to *Die Hard*. The James Bond movies remain iconic to this day. The early 2000s brought on *Harry Potter* and *Lord of the Rings*, instant hits that out-grossed every other film easily. Those last two seem to be the spiritual predecessor for the sequel hungry market today. Some have even argued that the art of the "adapted screenplay" might be a bane against originality in its own right – and those date back to as early as the 1920s.

So, it seems like sequels aren't a new phenomenon by any means, and that their rise may be our fault in the first place. Audiences, being the creatures of habit that they are, seem to want to stick to familiarity. The question now becomes – what changed that we are suddenly sitting up and taking notice? What factors aren't we considering?

Earlier this year, Disney and 21st Century Fox (containing both 20th Century Fox and Fox Entertainment) entered a merger, with Disney acquiring an impressive chunk of the company's IP. The merger was lauded in comic book circles for being everything the superhero genre could've dreamt of. Finally, we were getting the Fantastic 4 back in Marvel. However, what popular perception didn't account for were the real life (not comic book) ramifications. This scale of media consolidation is not helping our titular issue. Fox's more inventive movies and movies geared towards genres other than "blockbuster" get the raw end of the deal. Non-family friendly content is also affected. Why take risks when you're as big as Disney?

There is however a silver lining. The rise of streaming services like Netflix and Amazon have greatly helped the case of the obscure, original movie. Television today is in a true "Golden Age" becoming more inventive than ever. Some Netflix shows have the production value of big budget movies. Game of Thrones has crafted a genre of itself. Circling back, Fox's TV division was not a part of the acquisition mentioned earlier. The original movies we mentioned earlier have also found second homes on many streaming services.

At the end of the day, we, as consumers do play a pivotal part in this whole ordeal. We pay with our views, along with our wallet. So, the next time you see something like "Get Out" or "Baby Driver", buy a ticket to the show. Or be content in the realisation that even if you don't, you can always stream it on Netflix.