

Movies

Making heroes out of zeroes

With their heavy hitters signed off to other studios, we look at Marvel B-listers who may be next for the big screen

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What do you do when Spider-Man, the X-Men and Fantastic Four are otherwise occupied? You go deep into your bench.

Which describes the situation at Marvel Studios as it contemplates its movie slate beyond next summer's *The Avengers* (that will team Iron Man, Thor, Captain America and the Hulk.).

Problematically for the Disney-owned company is that they don't have access to many of their marquee players, including the aforementioned web-slinger and mutants. Those film rights were signed over to other studios long before Marvel decided to adapt its own material (the first film being 2008's *Iron Man*).

That means — in addition to *Iron Man 3* and probable sequels to *Thor* and *Captain America: The First Avenger* — they're going to have to pull from their ranks of lesser-known heroes.

And that could be a cause for concern considering that, while *Thor* has fared well for a B-list character, it will nevertheless land short of the genuine box-office godliness enjoyed by, say, Spider-Man. So who are going to be called to duty? These 10 look like the likeliest future Marvel adaptations.

S.H.I.E.L.D.

Presumably Samuel L. Jackson's Nick Fury will be joined by Scarlett Johansson's Black Widow and Jeremy Renner's Hawkeye — both of whom figure in *The Avengers* — when this spy thriller inevitably happens. Making it attractive? That it would help the studio branch into other genres (something it's also done with the mythic *Thor*) and help insulate the company from superhero-movie fatigue.



superhero lore, opening Marvel to the martial arts genre.

The Runaways:

This relatively new creation is about a group of teenagers who discover their parents are super-villains. Joss Whedon, writer-director of *The Avengers*, is a fan and actually penned some issues a few years ago.



Black Panther:

Let's face it: most superheroes are lily-white. Which would immediately distinguish this hero — an African prince — from the pack.



The Punisher:

This grim vigilante, who emerged out of the shadow of *Death Wish* and *Dirty Harry*, has been adapted disastrously before (see sidebar). Now Marvel has the rights to the character back. But can a remorseless killer find a home at family-friendly Disney?



Luke Cage:

A product of the Blaxploitation era of the 1970s — i.e. *Shaft* — Cage is a wrongly convicted prisoner who agrees to be experimented on, and



as a result, becomes steel-skinned and super-strong. Like *Black Panther*, Cage has been circled by filmmakers for a number of years.

Nova:

This character represents the cosmic, space-faring side of Marvel, but it's likely the studio will wait to see how *Green Lantern* — from rival DC Entertainment — performs this summer before committing to their own science-fiction opera.



Cloak and Dagger:

Not quite ready for the big screen? No worries. Marvel has also launched its own television division. (And remember, Disney owns both Marvel and ABC.) Among the characters banded about for a small screen treatment is this duo: a pair of street kids with chemically enhanced abilities.



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Scarlett Johansson's *Black Widow* works for S.H.I.E.L.D.

MARVEL COMICS PHOTOS

