



ADVANCE

In Marvel Studios' action-packed spy thriller "Black Widow," Natasha Romanoff aka Black Widow confronts the darker parts of her ledger when a dangerous conspiracy with ties to her past arises. Pursued by a force that will stop at nothing to bring her down, Natasha must deal with her history as a spy and the broken relationships left in her wake long before she became an Avenger. "I think from the very beginning when we first started talking about doing this standalone film, there was no reason to do it unless we could really dig deep and be brave and go there," says Scarlett Johansson, who reprises her role as Natasha/Black Widow. "Having played this character for a decade, I wanted to make sure that it would feel artistically and creatively rewarding for me as well as the fans."

Producer Kevin Feige, Marvel Studios' president and chief creative officer, says that Natasha Romanoff has sparked intrigue since her big-screen debut in 2010's "Iron Man 2." "She has such a rich backstory," says Feige. "We've hinted at it throughout all the other films. But we approach it in a completely unexpected way. She's been up to a lot all along—in between when we see her in the other movies—some of which will be surprising to people."

According to Feige, Johansson reached out to director Cate Shortland to consider helming the film. "Cate came to Los Angeles and fell in love with the character and the possibilities," says Feige. "She realized she could tell a very personal story and do something extremely special on a big canvas."

Says Shortland, "I think what's exciting about the film is we're playing with the audience's expectations. We're exploring parts of Natasha that the audience has absolutely no idea about. We explore her family, love and passion, and you get to see all these facets of her we have never seen before."

In addition to her 2010 debut, Natasha Romanoff has appeared in six Marvel films including “Marvel’s The Avengers,” “Captain America: The Winter Soldier,” “Avengers: Age of Ultron,” “Captain America: Civil War,” “Avengers: Infinity War” and last year’s exciting and emotional “Avengers: Endgame.” “Black Widow” is set before “Avengers: Infinity War.” “The film takes place on the heels of ‘Captain America: Civil War,’” explains co-producer Brian Chapek. “Natasha has broken the Sokovia Accords, betrayed Secretary Ross, and the Avengers find themselves disbanded. In the beginning of the movie, we establish Natasha desperate to evade Ross and leave U.S. soil. When she gets an opportunity to start over again, she quickly realizes that there are darker forces out there in the world compel her to return to the action.”

According to screenwriter Eric Pearson, the ongoing mystery of Natasha Romanoff was compelling—both for audiences and filmmakers. “I think she’s the one Avenger who’s shared the least about herself ever since we met her,” he says. “She’s not who she says she is in ‘Iron Man 2.’ She chooses to withhold her past and who she is personally from the audience and the other characters. In ‘Black Widow,’ we get to rip open her past and see what led to her hesitation to open up.”

For Jac Schaeffer, who contributed to the story, having the wealth of the Marvel Cinematic Universe and Scarlett’s portrayal as Natasha to draw upon was both lucrative and daunting. “There’s a burden to deliver on this woman that we know, love and idolize in so many ways,” she says. “There is such a rich tapestry to draw from and then we expand upon all of it.”

The end result is a high-intensity, action thriller, says Chapek. “At the same time, our movie answers a lot of mysteries about Natasha’s past,” he adds. “We’ve seen her character evolve and open herself up to us. We’ve given hints about who she is and what makes her tick. In ‘Avengers: Endgame,’ we saw Natasha get to a place in her life where she could make the ultimate sacrifice for the greater good. Now, we want to tell the story about who she really is as a human being and what led to her being capable of making that heroic decision.”

Executive producer Brad Winderbaum adds, “In every Marvel movie we try to bring a different tone, a different genre, a different idea to the table—something that we haven’t seen before, which lets us make wild swings between something like ‘Captain America: Winter Soldier’ to ‘Thor: Ragnarok.’ We are always searching for something new and with ‘Black Widow’ we unveil a whole aspect of her history that’s completely unexpected.”

Based on the beloved Marvel comic-book series, first published in 1964, “Black Widow” stars Tony® Award and BAFTA winner, and five-time Golden Globe® and recent double Oscar® nominee Scarlett Johansson (“Avengers: Endgame,” “Marriage Story,” “Jojo Rabbit”) as Natasha Romanoff/Black Widow, Oscar nominee Florence Pugh (“Midsommar,” “Little Women”) as Yelena Belova, Academy Award®-winning actress Rachel Weisz (“The Favourite,” “Disobedience”) as Melina, and Golden Globe nominee David Harbour (“Stranger Things,” “Dhaka”) as Alexei aka Red Guardian. O-T Fagbenle (“The Handmaid’s Tale,” “The Five”) was cast as Mason, and Academy Award and BAFTA winner William Hurt (“Avengers: Endgame,” “Avengers: Infinity War”) reprises his role as Secretary of State Thaddeus Ross.

Marvel Studios’ “Black Widow” is produced by Kevin Feige and helmed by multiple award-winning director Cate Shortland (“Berlin Syndrome,” “Somersault”). Brian Chapek (“Thor: Ragnarok” as associate producer) co-produces. Louise D’Esposito, Victoria Alonso, Scarlett

Johansson, Brad Winderbaum and Nigel Gostelow are the executive producers. The screenplay is by Eric Pearson (“Thor: Ragnarok”) and the story is by Jac Schaeffer (“WandaVision,” “The Hustle”) and Ned Benson (“The Disappearance of Eleanor Rigby: Them”).

The creative team includes director of photography Gabriel Beristain (“Agent Carter,” “Marvel One-Shot: Item 47”), BAFTA-nominated production designer Charles Wood (“Avengers: Endgame,” “Avengers: Infinity War”), BAFTA-winning costume designer Jany Temime (“Skyfall,” “Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 1 and 2”), editors Matt Schmidt (“Avengers: Endgame,” “Avengers: Civil War”) and Leigh Folsom Boyd (“Spider Man: Far From Home,” “Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Men Tell No Tales”), and BAFTA-winning visual effects supervisor Geoffrey Baumann (“Black Panther,” “Doctor Strange”).

Production for the spy thriller kicked off in Summer 2019, shooting on three continents over 87 days. Based in Pinewood Studios just outside of London, the film shot on location in the UK, Norway, Budapest, Morocco and Atlanta. “Black Widow”—the first film in Phase Four of the Marvel Cinematic Universe—will launch simultaneously in theaters and on Disney+ with Premier Access in most Disney+ markets on July 9, 2021.

PAST TENSE

Journey to the Past Reveals New Secrets, Allies and an Unstoppable Nemesis

As filmmakers peeled back the layers of Natasha Romanoff, they realized they’d have to go back in time to offer insight into the character and how she became Black Widow. The journey reveals a host of new characters that have shaped her life for better or worse.

Character Lineup:

NATASHA ROMANOFF, separated from the now-fractured Avengers, confronts the dark path she took to becoming a spy and assassin, as well as events that followed. She reluctantly reunites with an unlikely group of spies from her past who share a critical part of her history, as well as a desire to stop a lethal force from being unleashed. But Natasha’s efforts are threatened by a deadly assassin whose unique skillset is unlike anything Natasha has ever faced.

“When you see Natasha in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, she’s often this kind of impenetrable force,” says Scarlett Johansson, who returns as Black Widow. “She’s reckless and out of control but still has this amazing intellect. What are her secrets? Her vulnerabilities? I am excited to share her fragility and her strength. She is in a male world, and she projects a certain way of being in that world. What we wanted to do is find out who is the real Black Widow.”

YELENA BELOVA, a product of the Red Room’s ruthless training program, has a secret history with the Black Widow that she is determined to address. When Yelena finds herself caught in a world with dangerous threats behind every corner, her only chance

at survival may be through a tenuous truce with the person she blames for a lifetime of torment—Natasha Romanoff.

Florence Pugh portrays the fiery assassin. “Yelena is hurt and complicated and acts out,” says Pugh. “One of the coolest things about playing Yelena is just how complex and broken she is for someone who is so sure of what she does. She knows exactly how to function in the areas in which she’s been trained, but she has no clue how to live as a human being. She’s a lethal weapon but also a bit of a kid. That’s been one of the nicest qualities about her.”

ALEXEI/RED GUARDIAN, the Red Room’s answer to Captain America, is a super soldier and spy who lived a lifetime of triumph during the Cold War. Alexei’s years of espionage are behind him, but he still considers himself the ultimate hero. He loves sharing his greatness with those around him—which these days includes fellow inmates in the Russian prison where he resides. Deep down—way deep down—he harbors a lot of guilt about his life as a spy, especially when it comes to Natasha Romanoff, whom he knew long before she became Black Widow.

David Harbour portrays Red Guardian. “He grew up in the Soviet Union and was chosen for a program similar to the Americans’ Captain America,” says Harbour. “While the Americans were creating their hero, the Russians were developing the Red Guardian. The problem was that he did not become as famous as Captain America, and it’s the great tragedy of his life. He feels very unappreciated.”

MELINA is a highly trained spy who has been cycled through the Red Room’s Widow program four times. After various undercover missions, one of which involved a young Natasha Romanoff, the Red Room recognized Melina’s intelligence, making her one of their lead scientists. After decades of service, Melina has been able to distance herself from the Red Room, but when Natasha shows up, Melina must decide where her allegiance lies.

Rachel Weisz was called on to portray the brilliant Melina. “The Marvel Cinematic Universe is probably the most popular and far-reaching contemporary mythology that there is right now and it was definitely exciting to be invited to join them,” says Weisz.

TASKMASTER is a masked assassin who carries out deadly missions on behalf of the Red Room. Armed with the ability to mimic his enemies’ every move, the calculating and formidable Taskmaster will stop at nothing until he accomplishes his mission. “He has this ability called photographic reflexes—so if he fights you once he knows how to emulate your style,” says executive producer Brad Winderbaum. “Natasha’s tricks might work in their first altercation, but by round two and three he knows everything and she has to come up with something else.”