

More Marvel Mayhem: Loki Soars, but Secret Invasion and Echo Sink

By Steve Sternberg



Ten live-action TV series were produced for Disney+ between 2021 and 2024, with at least six more planned over the next couple of years. Some of these shows feature well-known characters who appeared in the theatrical films, while others pulled more obscure characters from the extensive Marvel comics library.

Netflix-originated series, *Jessica Jones* (2015-19) and *Daredevil* (2015-18) are still the top of the line, followed by Disney+'s *WandaVision* (2021), *Loki* (2021, 2023), and *Hawkeye* (2021). Not quite as good, but still worthy efforts, are the Netflix-originated *The Punisher* (2017, 2019) and *Luke Cage* (2016, 2018), along with Disney+'s *The Falcon and the Winter Soldier* (2021) and *Ms. Marvel* (2022). Interesting experiments, all in 2002, include, *Moon Knight*, *She-Hulk: Attorney at Law*, and *Werewolf by Night* – all have something to recommend them (and have been reviewed in previous issues of *The Sternberg Report*).

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Here are my reviews of the three latest entries, [Secret Invasion](#), [Loki](#) season two and [Echo](#). There are some spoilers ahead.



Secret Invasion (2023)

One season, 6 episodes

Loosely based on the epic 2008 Marvel comic-book series, [Samuel L. Jackson](#) reprises his role as Nick Fury, as he uncovers a conspiracy by a group of Skrulls (shape-shifting aliens) who have been infiltrating Earth for years as they scheme to take over the planet from humanity.

Talos ([Ben Mendelsohn](#)), the former leader of the Skrulls, who was first introduced in the [Captain Marvel](#) theatrical movie, is one of Fury's key allies. [Kingsley Ben-Adir](#) is Gravik, the main Skrull baddie, who leads the rebel Skrulls in their effort to conquer Earth. They plan to start a nuclear war between the United States and Russia. [Emilia Clarke](#) is G'iah, Talos's daughter, who works for Gravik. Whose side she is actually on is initially unclear.



This is the exact type of Marvel series that does not lend itself well to television, where the studio can't come close to satisfying fans of the comic series. In the comic-book event, the Skrulls spent years replacing numerous superheroes with impostors prior to their invasion.

Here, they replace various world leaders and government officials – since they obviously didn't have the budget to hire a cast of heroes or have more than one or two cinematic battle sequences.

I almost stopped watching after the first episode – killing off a major well-liked character is just lazy writing designed to shock the audience. But it was just disappointing and meaningless. It also seemed to have little impact on Fury, which was way out of character. I realize it probably cost a

bundle to snag [Emilia Clarke](#), but if you can't afford (spoiler) for more than just a brief appearance, just don't include her in the first place.



[Samuel L. Jackson](#) seems to be sleepwalking through the role of Nick Fury, showing none of the energy or charisma he displays in the various [Avengers](#) movies. Despite having Nick Fury fighting the Skrulls without calling in any of his superhero buddies (which is kind of ridiculous), there is no real sense of danger, and the Skrulls are defeated way too easily (and suddenly) after seeming unbeatable for five of the series' six-episodes.



[Olivia Colman's](#) performance as Sonya Falsworth, a high-ranking MI6 agent in the UK and one of Fury's old allies, is the series' lone bright spot. Don Cheadle reprises his role as James "Rhodey" Rhodes (an Avenger who operates the War Machine armor). But here, he is also Raava, a Skrull posing as Rhodes, who is also an envoy and advisor to the President of the United States. Apparently Rhodes was captured by the Skrulls a long time ago, indicating that the character we've seen in [Avengers](#) films may not have been the real Rhodes.

Up until now, this is the only Marvel series produced for Disney+ that totally misses the mark.



Loki (2021, 2023)

Two seasons, 12 episodes

This is the MCU's introduction to the multiverse (alternate timelines and realities) and alternate versions of well-known characters. Before discussing season two, here's a recap the

first season.

In the 2019 blockbuster film [Avengers Endgame](#), the Avengers go back in time seven years to when they were fighting Loki ([Tom Hiddleston](#)), God of Mischief and Thor's half-brother, in the "Battle of New York" (from the first [Avengers](#) movie in 2012). They need to get the Infinity Stones before Thanos acquires them and wipes out half the universe. In the chaos that ensues, Loki manages to get his hands on the powerful cosmic energy cube known as the Tesseract, which he uses to escape.

This did not happen in the events we saw in the original movie, thus creating a new timeline. This series follows what happens to that Loki, before we see him grow and redeem himself in [Thor: Ragnarok](#) and [Avengers: Infinity War](#).

Loki's disappearance has caught the attention of the Time Variants Authority (TVA), a powerful bureaucratic organization that exists outside of normal time and space. The TVA is tasked by the mysterious Timekeepers to make sure people stay in their set timeline. Any "variants" are put on trial and either reset into their expected timeline, or simply "pruned" (erased from existence). This Loki is now considered a variant.



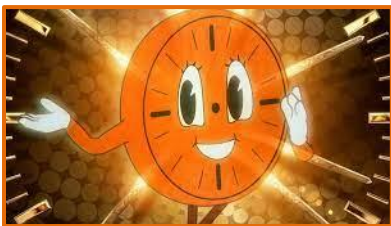
Just as the TVA judge, Ravonna Renslayer ([Gugu Mbatha-Raw](#)), declares Loki guilty and is about to have him “pruned,” TVA chief detective Mobius ([Owen Wilson](#)) steps in. He wants to use Loki to help them capture a dangerous variant who has been traveling through time

and killing TVA agents.



As Loki quickly discovers, magical powers don’t work in the TVA compound, so he is trapped. The equally talkative and charming Mobius tries to elicit information from Loki about why he does what he does, at the same time explaining what’s going on and how Loki varied

from his “set path.” For a god-like being who thrives on chaos, the idea that his path is predetermined by all-knowing keepers of the sacred timeline does not sit well. Mobius shows Loki scenes from events that those who saw the [Thor](#) and [Avengers](#) movies remember. Events that haven’t yet happened to this Loki.



The situation is helped along by the animated clock mascot of the TVA, known as Miss Minutes (voiced by [Tara Strong](#)), who conveys dire information with a smile – a surreal device in a surreal situation, but it does help the viewer understand what’s going on. “She” also has

orders and an agenda that Mobius and Loki become aware of in season two.

Loki has long been one of the most complex Marvel villains, and this take on his motivations, the impact of seeing how some of his former bad acts have impacted people he loves, and seeing his own death in what he is told is the future that is supposed to happen, is fascinating – and pulled off largely because of the chemistry between the immensely talented [Tom Hiddleston](#) and [Owen Wilson](#).



Mobius tells Loki the variant they are chasing is another version of Loki from another timeline. This Loki is in the form of a woman (smartly played by [Sophia Di Martino](#)). When he finds her, she tells him that she is no longer a Loki, and now goes by the name Sylvie. This character seems like a combination of Lady Loki and the Enchantress, both of whom appear in various Marvel comics (and is way too confusing to get into here). Her plan is to destroy the Timekeepers (who supposedly created the TVA) and blow up the sacred timeline.



As they question one another, she reveals details of her past that are substantially different from his. She also tells him that the TVA staff were not in fact created by the Timekeepers, but are rather all human variants who were plucked from their own timelines and have no memory of their previous lives. Did Mobius lie to him, or is he unaware of his own previous life? Loki is known to be deceitful and manipulative, so the fact that these two versions of Loki start to trust one another and actually team up can't end well (or can it?).

As they continue their banter, they both casually acknowledge that they often have meaningless sex with both women and men. While the comic books have occasionally referred to Loki's bisexuality, this is the first time a major character in the Marvel Cinematic Universe has been so designated – and is now officially part of the MCU canon. It should be noted that in Netflix's series, [Ragnarok](#), which provides another take on Thor, Loki is clearly bisexual. In Norse mythology, Loki shifts between male and female presentations and pronouns.



Having escaped from the TVA, they eventually wind up in a void at the end of time, where they meet several other versions of Loki from different timelines and realities, who have apparently been trapped there for quite a while. They have to remain in hiding lest the cloud monster Alioth, a trans-temporal entity and guardian of the Void destroys them. When TVA victims are pruned, we discover, they are actually banished here to be devoured by Alioth.

In the end, they escape the Void to discover the man behind the curtain, or rather “He Who Remains” ([Jonathan Majors](#)). He gives Loki and Sylvie a choice – they can replace him as arbiters of the Sacred Timeline, or destroy him, thus creating multiple timelines, and face thousands of versions of himself in thousands of multiverses, who are far “less benevolent.” While his real name is never mentioned, this is clearly the popular Marvel comics villain, Kang the Conqueror.



Loki and Sylvie have different ideas on how to proceed. One of them takes an action that immediately causes ripples through time as the sacred TVA timeline seems to branch off into countless directions.

This sets up a whole new Marvel Cinematic Universe (or Multiverse), and introduces a new major cross-movie villain. It also paved the way for the theatrical films, [Dr. Strange and the Multiverse of Madness](#) and [Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania](#).

Jonathan Majors was recently convicted of assaulting his ex-girlfriend, placing his Kang character, which was supposed to be the lynchpin of the next phase of the MCU, into question. Given that Kang has already been established in the comic books as having many alternate identities across the multiverse, and Marvel comics fans know of his other incarnations, it should be relatively easy to replace the actor who plays him. But it seems Marvel has instead decided to move away from the character altogether. It is not yet clear how they plan to proceed.



Season two is more of a pure action thriller, as Loki teams up with Mobius, TVA agent Hunter B-15 ([Wunmi Mosaku](#)), and other agents “in a battle for the soul of the TVA,” as they race to find Sylvie, Ravonna Renslayer, and Miss Minutes, and prevent the multiverse timelines from being destroyed. At the same time, Loki is trying to control the power that has him randomly jumping from one timeline branch to another and back again.



Sylvie is now working as a cashier in a McDonald's in 1982 Oklahoma, in a timeline in danger of being destroyed. [Eugene Cordero](#) is a TVA receptionist who in another timeline is Frank Morris, a bank robber and only person known to have escaped from Alcatraz prison. [Kate Dickie](#) is General Dox, a TVA general who is searching for Sylvie and still believes in the TVA's mission to prune branched timelines. [Key Huy Quan](#) is Ouroboros, a quirky TVA technician who either designed or knows how to fix every piece of TVA technology – he also portrays A.D. Doug, a theoretical physics teacher at Caltech and failed science fiction author from 1994. All have been plucked from their own timelines and placed in the TVA (with no memory of their previous lives).



In the end, Loki helps save the day and finds his “glorious purpose,” as his journey from villain, to anti-hero, to actual hero, to something beyond, is a satisfying culmination to Loki's story, and creates a new multiverse – it remains to be seen how this impacts the Marvel Cinematic Universe going forward. But it does effectively move away from the Kang character.

No word yet on a potential season three. [Loki](#) is top of the line when it comes to Disney+ Marvel TV shows (rivalled only by [WandaVision](#)).



Echo (2024)

One season, 5 episodes

[Alaqua Cox](#) reprises her role from [Hawkeye](#) as Maya Lopez, aka Echo, a deaf Native American Choctaw, and former leader of the Tracksuit Mafia, a criminal gang working for Wilson Fisk/The Kingpin. Maya had believed Hawkeye killed her

gangster father, when he was temporarily a vigilante named Ronan (in [Avengers: Endgame](#)). In reality, Wilson Fisk had engineered her father's death. [Echo](#) starts off five months after the events in the [Hawkeye](#) season finale, where, after discovering his deception, Maya shoots Kingpin in the face. Maya returns home to Oklahoma to reconnect with her Native American roots, with Wilson Fisk's mobsters hot on her trail. Apparently, he is not dead as Maya believed, only injured.



[Echo](#) is the first series under the new Marvel Spotlight banner, which introduces standalone content that doesn't require familiarity with the larger MCU and its various story arcs. Although if you haven't seen [Hawkeye](#), this series can be confusing. The Echo character first

appeared in a 1999 comic-book issue of *Daredevil*, and there are some differences in both her background and powers (not worth getting into here).

I thought that the misguided 2023 effort, [Secret Invasion](#), was the bottom of the Disney+ Marvel barrel. I was wrong. [Echo](#) now has that designation all to itself.



Unfortunately, [Alaqua Cox](#) does not have the charisma needed to carry a superhero show, and seems stuck in a monotone, emotionless facial expression. Her virtually identical reaction to whatever is happening around her makes her less interesting as the series progresses. The plot is slow-paced and never ramps up. The acting is flat. The Native American historical and mystical elements seem haphazardly slapped on just so Marvel can point to its continued diversity efforts (and lacks any emotional depth). Even the few fight scenes lack any real drama.



And they do the one thing you simply cannot do to a major supervillain – make him look weak. [Vincent D'Onofrio's](#) Kingpin, so fearsome and powerful in [Daredevil](#), is a ghost of his former self here – highlighted by the absurdity of Maya so easily defeating him. Apparently she now has the supernatural ability to channel her ancestors, who echo through her, and harness their energy and abilities (and temporarily transfer them to other people), which leads to one of the more ridiculous fight scenes. Her abilities include, enhanced strength, martial arts expertise, regenerative healing ability, and expert marksmanship.



The brief, and surprisingly low-intensity fight between Maya and Daredevil, shown in a flashback scene in the first episode, appears to have no other purpose than to be included in promos misleading viewers into thinking Daredevil actually has a role in the series. Daredevil fights are usually the best choreographed on television – not this time. I'm not even sure Daredevil was played by [Charlie Cox](#) here. The character was only shown in costume and mostly from a distance or blurred (from sunlight glaring through the window) – and the couple of times he spoke, it didn't really sound like him.



I'm also not sure why they made a big deal of putting a TV-MA rating on the show, since there's no sexual content, and both the violence and fight scenes are significantly less violent than any of the Netflix-originated series that received the TV-MA label when they moved to

Disney+. It almost seems as if the streamer thought the adult rating was a way to attract more viewers who might have been disappointed with Marvel's recent efforts.

As a Marvel fan, to say I was disappointed watching this mess is an understatement. On the other hand, perhaps as a Marvel fan my expectations are causing me to overreact. Check it out for yourself and let me know.