



Black Widow: Homecoming

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The deadliest agent in the Marvel Universe has finally gotten out of the spy game, and she's not asking for much, just a life of her own.

When a sudden assassination attempt provides a harsh reality check, the former Soviet agent tracks a string of international killings that will lead her back to a Russia she can barely recognize.

Collecting: *Black Widow* 1-6

Black Widow: Homecoming Details

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From Reader Review Black Widow: Homecoming for online ebook

Paula says

Gran mujer.

Jdetrick says

There's some ok spy thriller here with some decent art, but the plot is horrible. It removes all of the Black Widow's agency from her earlier days, making her a pawn of men. This breaks down a strong female character, of which there are too few to begin with.

Artemis says

I have a recurring nightmare where men try to explain feminism to me.

This is the fourth or fifth time I've read this trade. You notice little things after that many read-throughs. There's a scene early on where the narration is intended to read "there are friends and there are *friends*," but because comics love to overuse italics, both friends are italicized. Another scene has Natasha breaking into a house. She should be wearing gloves, but at first, she isn't. Then, out of nowhere, gloves appear on her hands.

The villains' plan is even more ridiculous on re-read. (view spoiler)

Another thing I noticed is that Morgan loves to start scenes in media res, often in the middle of a conversation or even a sentence, and then have clunky expository dialogue explain what's going on. He relies on this device too much, and that may be why the book is hard to follow on first read. Well, that and the overabundance of characters. There are too many new players for a six issue series. He would have been better off cutting several people. As it is, we're left wondering, 'Who is this white guy? Why are they talking to him?' far too often. Some diversity might have helped differentiate them. Everyone in this series is white, except for one black character who delivers exposition and dies.

I kept coming back to this story because my feelings never coalesced. It was getting some kind of reaction, but not one I could explain. I've finally sorted out my thoughts. The star rating is a mark of ambivalence more than a true assessment of quality. This is a mixed bag, and the good and bad are intertwined.

Homecoming tells the story of Natalya Romanova, a spy turned rock climbing enthusiast. After an unknown man tries to kill her, she leaves her Arizona home to track down who sent the would-be assassin. She is joined by another former spy Phil Dexter and a teenage runaway named, for some reason, Sally Anne. She follows a trail of clues to unravel a mystery about her past. Along the way, there are many conversations about the USA vs the USSR and why men are awful.

This all seems fine for a Black Widow story. The main problem is I don't think this *is* a Black Widow story. The Natalya Romanova here is an original character wearing Black Widow's skin.

Maybe she's a Skrull. That would explain a lot.

The Natasha in *Homecoming* is an unrepentant killer with only the mildest concern for human life. You, as a filthy casual, may think that's normal. She's Black Widow, after all. But the Natasha of the best Black Widow stories has an underlying humanity that Morgan exorcised. It's clear that Morgan's belief is that too many feelings, too much niceness, would make Widow a lesser character. She needs to be cold and ruthless to the core.

There's a contempt for femininity -- and for any woman who doesn't fit Morgan's narrow version of empowerment -- running through this book. It's there in the idea that Natasha needs to be stripped of her softer side, in the evil cosmetics company subplot stolen from the movie *Catwoman*, and in the characters' conversations about feminism. It's most obvious, though, in the condescending, condemnatory mentions of sex workers and other women Morgan views as interchangeable with sex workers. This was written in the mid 2000s, the era of "Stupid Girls." Its attitude towards women hasn't aged well. Morgan brings up the Madonna/Whore Complex in one scene (it's "pole dancers and hard-faced harridans" now, he says), only to fall face first into it. There are good women and bad women, he posits. Bad women are sluts who love makeup. Good women are free of all femininity.

Free to do what?

Free to be men, I guess.

Which is funny since his view of gender is one where women are under constant assault from men and, uh, that's about it. Morgan only sees women in relation to men, the landscape of our lives an empty field full of wild dogs ready to tear us apart but not much else.

The core of this book, what makes it work and not work, is that Morgan writes Black Widow like she is his own character. He views Natasha as written by others as unworthy, marred by girly things like ballet, bullet bracelets, and feelings. So he set out to fix her. He ignored her place in the greater Marvel Universe, opting for a story where she is retired. However, the dialogue tells us this takes place in the early-mid 2000's when it was released. How time works in the Marvel Universe makes my head hurt, so I'll ignore that. I'm still confused about how this fits into her personal timeline.

It must fit into her personal timeline in the main universe because its back half is all about changing that history. Suddenly, Black Widow's ballet experience was a dream. Ballet is *girl shit*, and Morgan won't stand for it. Instead, he'll use Widow's longstanding backstory as a way to be condescending about things associated with women. Ballet? You thought she did BALLET? You rube, you utter fool, this is Richard K. Morgan's waifu, and she will not be weighed down by *feminine pursuits*.

(This is total waifu-ery, by the way. A classic case of a man writing an "empowered woman" who is, conveniently, exactly the kind of woman he wants to have sex with.)

Then there is the nonsense about (view spoiler) Everything was because a man made her do it. Her bravery wasn't her own. It was a trick by a man who wanted to use her. Her happy memories were invented. She is the product of men controlling every aspect of her life. A puppet who can't remember her own childhood.

Remind me again why this book is supposed to be feminist.

If Morgan had created a new character with this backstory, it would have been one thing. Instead, he took a

pre-existing character with decades of history and erased her agency and history. He treated her struggles and past as disposable because he didn't think she was ~~fuckable~~ feminist enough.

The fact that she's a new character who happens to have Natasha's name and backstory (until she doesn't) is also the strength of this series. There is a feeling you get when a writer is making a character their own. They may be going off script, but by leaning into their specialities and interests, they're imbuing the work with a confidence it wouldn't have if they were trying to recreate someone else's Spider-man or someone else's Captain America. This is a common occurrence when a novelist writes Big Two characters. It has advantages and disadvantages.

Books like this where a writer is doing whatever they want have an appeal for new or casual readers. They don't know or don't care what is "in character." They don't have a clear idea of what a character *should* be, but they pick up on the passion and energy.

I don't think reinvention is an inherently bad thing. I love Fraction and Aja's *Hawkeye*, even though, like all Matt Fraction series, its hero is Matt Fraction. Or Matt Fraction's idea of himself, anyway. When you're reinventing a character in a sexist way, it's different. Morgan can't see what is good about the actual Black Widow. He holds her in contempt, and he created a different character with her name to remedy the things he saw as wrong.

When men can't see the value in long-standing female characters, I'm suspicious. More often than not, their confusion is rooted in not seeing women's stories as important. When something has endured for decades, it shouldn't be dismissed out of hand. There is a reason people are drawn to it. There is *always* a reason, good or bad. If you can't see it because it has a female face, that's your problem.

Unless you become a comic book writer, and then it's my problem too. Why not make a new character if you like the idea of Black Widow but hate everything about her? File the serial numbers off and make something new. Even if people noticed, they probably wouldn't care.

Tzippy says

[I didn't like how this story retconned that into her having been his pawn all these years. (hide spoiler)]

Howell Murray says

This one is a somewhat different take on this long-running character. She is ANGRY!! Not a very likable character, but understandable because someone is trying to kill her. This also delves into her early origins, which explain some of the anger. And she is angry not just for herself but for some injustices to others, especially women. I give this a 4 for the story but only a 2 for the art.

Isaac Quek says

If you're into the Jason Bourne film series, you would love this.

Never judge a book by its cover - clearly true in this case. The stories present inside have absolutely nothing to do with the cover art. The art inside is gritty, messy, the artist of the book majors on depicting reality as it is - alley ways, derelict buildings within soviet Russia, street scenes as it is, which is a far cry from the airbrushed reality of the cover art. Altogether disconcerting - the oppositeness of the art on the cover and the art inside.

The series is intelligent, layered, and the narrative takes its time to slow burn to its conclusions. Ie. not a writing style you see which sells comics today.

You have none of the comic book cliches which fill the standard series and sells books which ironically is present on the cover art.

It surprises with the themes which it chooses to explore. The story interweaves well several diverse and distinct themes: it is a realistic lens exploring the themes of present-day prevailing capitalism, Soviet History, the role of soldiers and the military/government security agencies including the KGB and CIA, the commodification / treatment and portrayal of women. It is united by the strong voice of the central character.

The writer takes his time to throw out its secrets and twists at its own pace, it rewards the patience of the reader. The rewards are definitely worth the read.

This would be the definitive origin story of the Black Widow exploring the Red Room soviet program which created her, I see that the modern Avengers films - the most recent Ultron one borrowed content from this series.

I liked the way the series slowly peeled away at the motivations of the character and her inner psychological workings, while making it a pretty competent spy-thriller, comparable to the Bourne film series.

One of those books which keeps you pondering over the content well after the read. Excellent read.

Ricky Ganci says

Morgan can write, hands down. And even though his unmistakable prose was exchanged, in this case, for pictures, the dialogue, themes, and storytelling style bore his totally unique and absolutely stellar fingerprints. In this story, Morgan takes on lots of big issues that hit a little closer to home—it reads thematically very much like *Market Forces*. There's the corporation, the lack of respect for the consumer that pays for that corporation's livelihood, and the mystery behind...something. It's like post-socialist spy aftermath noir, and not cyberpunk noir, but it's still noir in the flavor that only Morgan can manufacture. Natasha is a really cool and strong female lead, and I liked the fact that Phil sort of filled in as a stereotypical male sidekick. I can totally understand why this novel didn't sell well in stores: it makes a fairly pointed attack on the comics industry and in the general portrayal of women overall. It lacks the fantasy element and offers in its stead sharp observations about the motives behind corporate gladiatorialship, a econo-humanist ideal that tragically caused a people to whore themselves to those who came to claim their way of life (corrupt though it may have been), and does both behind a pretty interesting backstory of sabotage, conditioning (and there's your *Takeshi*) and science fiction elements. I really enjoyed reading something different that Morgan wrote, outside the form of prose, and even though it's a graphic novel, I really felt I learned some cool stuff about post-1989 Russia and the way the people must have felt after the Berlin Wall came down. Only Morgan could pull that off in a comic book that's supposed to be about a super-sexy

Russian spy. Only Morgan, God bless him.

Second Reading:

Richard K. Morgan writes about three things: expatriates on the run from the organizations that used to employ and/or embrace them, corporate and government interests being evil at heart, and violence. What impresses me most about these six issues of **BLACK WIDOW** is how even with the predictable "Richard K" elements, this story is unique for comics. It doesn't contain anything too epic--no huge clash of juggernauts, and no giant, impossibly huge overarching story. Rather, it is comprised of a series of conversations between a half a dozen key characters and a handful of peripherals. And while one of those characters is the fabled Nick Fury of Avengers fame, he, like the Widow herself, is simply a voice for discussion. He does not get involved in the violence, of which there is very little. He simply plays the part that Morgan has written for him: the estranged handler, out to do the good thing, but whose hands are tied by the Powers That Be.

Natalya is voiced with the perfect blend of power, decisiveness, and depth to keep her from being the woman-object spy. To offset that archetype (or stereotype, perhaps), he introduces Sally Anne, whose abduction wends to way into **THE THINGS THEY SAY ABOUT HER**. Phil latches onto her and not the Widow, leaving Romanov free to explore the KGB-turned-corporate plot which drives the characters forward, and which provides the context for Morgan's dialogue, which, as always, is nearly flawless. The climax contains the right blend of theme and violence, as well as the teaser for part two, bookending with the assassination of the three other discharged Black Widow agents from the beginning of the book to contain one of the best-written stories that comics has seen in recent years, and certainly the perfect new direction for the Black Widow characters and storylines.

G. Hoffmann says

A really good Black Widow story by Richard Morgan, with great art as always by Sienkiewicz. The characters are great, the plot is tight and well-told. The feminism themes are a little heavy handed, but it works overall. I thought the ending was quite abrupt, but since then I have found that there's a sequel to this one, **The Things They Say About Her**. Overall, recommended!

Tyler says

I'm so glad I read this even though I was so disappointed by the last BW book I read (no connection) because this was SO MUCH FUN.

Stephanie Griffin says

Not having read any previous Black Widow comics, I'm not sure how much of this storyline is her true origin story, if any. I bought Vol. 1 & 2 back in 2007 when I knew I would be meeting the author, Richard K Morgan, a man I tracked down to the UK around 2002 after reading his phenomenal first novel, **Altered Carbon**. Real fan-girl activity. Anyway, I liked this volume well enough. But the cover art! Yuck! (Vol. 2's cover is even worse!)

Mladen says

As someone who has never read a Black Widow comic...well technically that's not true because i read Black Widow Deadly Origin a long time ago. But I don't remember it that much, maybe I should read it again in the near future...anyway. I thought Homecoming would be a good start to read about the character and after finishing it. What did I think about the book?

I thought it was good, engaging, well written story with interesting twists. If there is one thing I would nitpick about Richard K Morgan's writing is that there were a couple of scenes where the dialogue could have been written a little better and more elegantly. To sound less, like a middle finger to the male gender. Other things I didn't like about this comic, is the two different art styles. There were panels where it looked decent, and there were other ones, where it looked like shit.

Overall I enjoyed it, not great or amazing but a good comic to keep you interested from start to finish.

Jenny says

This makes me really wish they would do a Black Widow solo movie.

Ivy says

5 ?

Nice to see Natasha again. Sad that the other Black Widows died. Enjoyed seeing Natasha in action. Glad Nat was able to stop Vassily. Hope Phil and the girl will be okay.

Can't wait to read more Black Widow comics!!!!

Anne says

A very Shallow black & white Buddy Read.

I accidentally read the second volume, The Things They Say About Her, first. Because...**thank you Marvel for your crappy labeling**.

Anyway, I confused by her amoral attitude toward kidnapping and/or killing people. Also, she was a *weeeeeee* bit of a rage monster.

Why?

Well, the answer is in this one.

Natasha has *retired* from the spy games, and has begun to have a somewhat normal life. She's all chilled out 'n stuff.

Can I still say 'chilled out'? Or is that like something that only old people who are trying to sound cool say nowadays? 'Cause I'm not, like...old. Really! Fuck it.

Get off my lawn!

Where was I?

Ok, she's relaxed and enjoying civilian life. At least, until the first assassin comes for her. Then she's all, **Hi-Ya! Ker-Chop! Snap! Crackle! Pop!**, and kills him with her ninja spy awesomeness.

It turns out, someone is sending assassins after all the women who were part of the Black Widow program. And if Natasha wants to stay alive, she needs to figure out who and why. Which means getting some help from a disgraced ex-S.H.I.E.L.D. operative, and going on a road trip.

Along the way she runs into some men trying to assault a teenage girl, and ends up taking her along for the ride.

And this is the Sally Anne from the other volume that I was so confused about!

Sorry, but I get all excited when things finally start making sense!

Also included in this one is a bit more of Natasha's childhood origin in the Black Widow program. And a lot of it was quite a surprise for her.

There's a bunch of other things that happen, but it all explains Natasha's transition into a more mercenary character in the second volume. And even with the art being somewhat iffy in spots (my opinion), I enjoyed this quite bit.

Recommended if you're interested in reading more about the Black Widow.

Anthony says

Beautiful looking book. I still isn't understand why Marvel gave this series Greg Land covers on it's initial release. Not only is his style horrid, it couldn't look any farther apart from the interior artwork.
