



Why Warner Bros. Killed 'Batgirl': Inside the Decision Not to Release the DC Movie

On Tuesday, the death of "Batgirl" sent shockwaves across Hollywood. The picture had concluded filming months ago and was in test screenings while filmmakers Adil El Arbi and Bilall Fallah ("Bad Boys for Life," "Ms. Marvel") went through the post-production process. It had a \$75 million budget that increased to \$90 million owing to COVID-related overages. Leslie Grace ("In the Heights") expressed her excitement at getting the central role and working with co-stars Michael Keaton (as Batman), J.K. Simmons (as her character's father, Commissioner Gordon), and Brendan Fraser (as the villain, Firefly).

In other words, the film was almost completed and was already gaining attraction among viewers. Why would Warner Bros. Discovery toss away all of that? The most likely explanation, according to those familiar with the matter, is taxes.

According to many reports, "Batgirl" was created under a separate Warner Bros. administration, led by Jason Kilar and Ann Sarnoff that was solely focused on creating HBO Max, the company's streaming service. Kilar's infamous plan to release the studio's whole 2021 theatrical slate simultaneously on the streamer helped boost the subscriber base but compromised the studio's reputation with top-tier talent was part of that attempt (though many agents and stars privately came to appreciate the move when the company paid generous bonuses as a make-nice).

Even before David Zaslav took over as CEO of Warner Bros. Discovery this spring, the exec embarked on a well-publicized listening tour to mend the company's connection with the creative community. As part of that endeavor, Zaslav has made no secret of his intention to reverse Kilar's policy and commit to releasing first-run feature films in theatres before releasing them on HBO Max.

"Batgirl" was allegedly neither huge enough to be worthy of a massive theatrical release nor little enough to make commercial sense in an increasingly competitive streaming world. Cost the money to broaden the scope of "Batgirl" for cinemas, plus the \$30 million to \$50 million needed to sell it domestically and the tens of millions more needed for a global rollout, might have roughly doubled spending on the picture, according to insiders. (WB and Warner Bros. Discovery representatives declined to comment on this article.)



The most apparent answer would appear to be to release the film on HBO Max. Instead, the company has shelved "Batgirl," as well as the "Scoob!" sequel, and multiple sources claim it will almost probably seek a tax write-off on both projects, which is considered internally as the most financially sensible method to recuperate the money (at least on an accountant's ledger). It might defend this by blaming it on a post-merger shift in strategy.

However, doing so would prevent Warner Bros. from monetizing either film – no HBO Max premiere, no sale to another company. Meanwhile, it remains to be seen how much the choice will cost the studio in terms of intellectual capital.

