

Review: Captain Marvel

“Captain Marvel” is bearing the weight of the entire Marvel Cinematic Universe on its shoulders. It is the first female-lead Marvel movie, a new origin story, a prequel for the Avengers and also the set up for its epic conclusion.

Captain Marvel (played by Oscar-winner Brie Larson), is introduced as Vers (rhymes with “cheers”), a Kree warrior from planet Hala who crash-lands on to Earth in the mid-1990s. She teams up with the familiar, yet much younger-looking, faces of S.H.I.E.L.D. agents Nick Fury (Samuel L. Jackson) and Phil Coulson (Clark Gregg) in the midst of a battle between the Kree and the shapeshifting Skrulls, lead by Talos (Ben Mendelsohn) Along the way, Vers begins to piece together who she really is and becomes the most powerful hero in the MCU.

While a fun and empowering movie-going experience, the film can be confusing and jammed-packed with some hokey humor and enough nostalgia to fill all the shelves at Blockbuster. Brie Larson shows that Captain Marvel packs a powerful photon punch is a forced not to be messed with, the lack-luster battle scenes and complex storyline may seem disappointing. However, the high expectations and proximity to “Avengers: End Game” might be more responsible for such let downs.

When we meet Vers, we know just as much about her as she knows about herself. She is learning how to use her powers - which are not fully realized until later in the film - and control her emotions from her mentor Yon-Rogg (Jude Law) and the Supreme Leader, who for Vers, manifests itself as Annette Bening's character, an unknown woman who haunts Vers' dreams of the past.

While on Earth, Ver's learns that she is in fact Air Force pilot Carol Danvers. In flashbacks, we see glimpses of Carol singing karaoke with her friends and not taking any crap from men who underestimate her strength. The woman in these flashbacks is not quite the woman we see in the present. While past-Carol is tough, fun, and full of personality, the Carol we see now feels more reserved and one-dimensional. However, this can be chalked up to her

“re-programming” as an emotionally repressed Kree soldier fighting a war she never fully understood.

The more Carol uncovers about her past, the more she questions her loyalties and purpose. This journey of self-discovery leads her to become the “best version of herself”: An Avenger with agency.

While Larson gives a great performance, her character often gets outshined by a supporting cast that packs deeper emotion and humor. Jackson was a delight on screen in a film that also serves as a mini origin story for Fury, who is featured in this film with two eyes and aged-down CGI. He had great chemistry with Larson, giving real buddy-cop-movie vibes, and with Goose, the cat that steals his heart and the hearts of even the most loyal dog lovers in the audience. Mendelsohn’s transformative performance as Talos is packed with personality and wit that makes you root for him from the beginning. He delivers a lot of the emotion in the movie, giving him a compelling arch that Carol doesn’t quite achieve.

The film is directed and co-written by Anna Boden and Ryan Fleck, best known for films like “Half Nelson,” “Sugar,” and “Mississippi Girl.” But don’t be fooled, almost none of their seasoned indie voice translates to this big-budget action movie. The film blends well into the established tone of the recent Marvel movies, providing a lot of the same almost-too-cheesy lines, nostalgic soundtrack and ensemble chemistry of the “Guardians of the Galaxy” films.

However, the filmmakers break out of the typical formula for origin stories with a nonlinear narrative. The film drops down in the middle of the story, when Carol already has her powers, and relies heavily on flashbacks. It sometimes feels like you are playing catch up until the questions are cleared up by the end. This can make things unclear and confusing for this first act, but are justified in a way because it mirrors the internal journey of Carol’s amnesia.

What really sets this film apart is the female power at its core. Carol can hold her own as she naturally ascends into her position as a galactic hero. Maybe now we can stop saying “female superhero” and call them what they are: just superheroes.

While the battle scenes leave much to be desired, hearing No Doubt's "Just a Girl" play as Carol kicks butt was very much appreciated. Also appreciated: the absence of any romantic relationship. It is rare in a film with a female protagonist, yet it felt totally natural. Any romance would have muddled the plot more and taken away from Carol's already-complicated journey. Instead, main relationship here is between Carol and Maria Rambeau (Lashana Lynch), her ever-loyal best friend from the Air Force.

Another plus was the wardrobe choices. It is nice to see a suit of armor not designed through the male gaze. The band T-shirts and flannels that make up Carol's casual Earth clothes were a great touch. However, women everywhere are still waiting for the day a female action hero throws her hair back in a ponytail before gearing up for a fight.

While "Captain Marvel" lived up to all the hype for female-centered superhero movies, it may be a little underwhelming for some as the lead up to "Endgame." Regardless of your feeling about the film, the first end credit scene (yes, there are two) leave the audience feeling like Carol is definitely the key to saving us all. The look and the message of the film allow Captain Marvel to shine as a powerful hero who is more than capable of giving the patriarchy a figurative, and literal, gut punch it deserves.