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A low-stakes 'Captain Marvel' backstory now to save the universe later

Marvel dug into its archives and pulled out an All-American heroine ahead of next 'Avengers'

Captain Marvel" has one job. That job is to explain the origin story of its titular shero well enough to justify her role in saving the universe when "Avengers: Endgame" opens on April 26.

At the climax of "Avengers: Infinity War," tough-love villain Thanos disintegrated half the universe (ostensibly for its own good), including a critical mass of Marvel superheroes. Someone else super will have to step in to put things right.

Which explains why the good folks at Marvel dug into the comic archives and repurposed a halter top- and thong-wearing fantasy character, once known as Ms. Marvel, into an all-American warrior girl.

In contrast to D.C. Comics' exotic and cosmopolitan Wonder Woman, an antiquities expert with an office in the Louvre, Brie Larsen's scrappy Carol Danvers — that's "Captain Marvel" to you — is all-American in temperament and outlook. Pure U.S. Air Force,

clad in an aerodynamic red, gold, and blue leather flight suit, she's kickass, not eye candy, with a light touch of alien-altered DNA.

Her memory has been wiped, and she isn't who she thinks she is. We go along for the ride as she discovers her identity, her history and her powers.

Danvers is relatable, particularly in her sarcastic moments as she deals with the shape-shifters and bad guys who obstruct her journey.

Set in 1995, the movie's MacGuffin is an energy core from which Danvers' Air Force mentor,

Dr. Wendy Lawson (Annette Bening), has developed a light-speed engine sought by Kree aliens.

Lawson is also the corporeal representation of the Kree's leader, who takes the form of



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whomever one admires most.

A digitally youthened Samuel L. Jackson plays Nick Fury, the S.H.I.E.L.D. agent who, after Danvers crashes from the sky through the roof of a Blockbuster Video store, quickly learns that threats to Earth can also arrive from space.

Jackson and Larson have worked together in previous movies, including "Kong: Skull Island" and the upcoming Netflix release "Unicorn Store," which Larson also directed. They have

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great chemistry. Together the two actors make a charming team.

An orange tabby cat named Goose, after Tom Cruise's wingman in "Top Gun," is the louche thief of many scenes. His feline

unpredictability is the catalyst (no pun intended) for the film's important plot pivots.

With the profusion of big-budget action movies, even state-of-the-art special effects fail to stir our visceral responses. The action sequences in "Captain Marvel" — which employ deadly electrical bolts, crashing superhero armor and high-speed vehicles, both earthly and galactic — don't seem all that special.

Besides, the stakes are low by movie standards. Danvers' journey is to find herself, but we've known who she is ever since the movie's trailer dropped, not to mention the encyclopedic knowledge of comic book fans.

In February, Larson publicly advocated for the inclusion of more women and minorities at press junkets. Such diversity was especially important, she argued, with a movie like "Captain Marvel."

The backlash was tsunamic. Internet trolls organized a campaign to bombard the film with negative votes on Rotten Tomatoes, forcing the movie site to remove its "want to see" option for fans to indicate interest in upcoming movies. (A similar campaign was launched against "Black Panther.")

Such sandbagging did not seem to scare anyone away from the theater. "Captain Marvel" took in more than \$153 million domestically on its opening weekend for a total of \$455 million worldwide.

By all measures the mission of this combat-ready, girl-power story was accomplished.

Who knows, come April, Captain Marvel may even save the universe.