

Screen Themes: Captain Marvel vs The Punisher

By John Turnbull

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It's time for some mindless violence and misandry (not really), as entertainment editor John Turnbull checks out two characters at the opposite ends of the power and moral spectrum, big screen blockbuster Captain Marvel and small screen psychopath The Punisher.

Captain Marvel

Directed by Anna Boden & Ryan Fleck
(2019)

Following comments from [Brie Larson](#) regarding the [lack of diversity](#) in film reporting (which were pretty accurate, based on my experience), [Captain Marvel](#) received a significant backlash from insecure white

dudes on the internet, all of whom predicted the movie's impending failure at the box office. Not for the first time, angry white dudes are looking a little silly, as the movie cruises past [\\$750 million](#) internationally, increasing the odds of more female-led superhero movies being made.

Set in the 1990s, and telling the origin story of the titular heroine, Captain Marvel is fun for the most part and, had it actually been released in the 1990s, probably would have been considered great. Unfortunately, in the wake of excellent genre movies like Wonder Woman and Black Panther, Captain Marvel is merely pretty good.

On the upside, [Samuel L. Jackson](#) is great as young Nick Fury, de-aged to look like a 30 year old who runs like he's 70. Australian treasure [Ben Mendelsohn](#) is fantastic as Skrull ruler Talos, working his way through half a dozen accents before setting on broad Aussie about half way through. The soundtrack is also pretty sweet, particularly if you grew up in the '90s. On the downside, the script could have done with a couple more rewrites, and Brie Larson provides a strong physical presence but lacks much of the subtlety and warmth she displayed in Room. Oh, and Jude Law sucks.

With the notable exception of directing teams that happen to be related (Coens, Wachowskis, Russos), movies directed by more than one person tend to be a little disjointed. Captain Marvel co-directors and writers [Anna Boden](#) and [Ryan Fleck](#) are both

longtime romantic partners, and have worked together for 16 years, yet cannot escape this problem. The indie darlings ([Half Nelson](#), [Sugar](#)) struggle to maintain an emotional connection through the 2-hour-plus runtime, which isn't helped by a script that isn't as funny as it thinks it is.

I do like the cat though.

The Punisher (Season Two)

Showrunner Steven Lightfoot (2019)

Created the year I was born by [Gerry Conway](#) and [John Romita Sr.](#), the Punisher is an often misunderstood and polarising character. While initially conceived as a fairly scathing commentary on vigilante violence, the character has been adopted by military and law-enforcement types, who see no irony in adorning their vehicles with the logo of a mass murderer.

Across three mediocre-to-decent movies, starring [Dolph Lundgren](#) (1989), [Thomas Jane](#) (2004) and [Ray Stevenson](#) (2008) in the title role, The Punisher/Frank Castle never really felt right. The thing that probably came closest was a high-quality fan film called *Dirty Laundry*, starring a returning [Thomas Jane](#) playing a weary, slightly more sympathetic version of the Castle. And then [Jon Bernthal](#) came along.

Much like recent seasons of [Daredevil](#) and *Jessica Jones*, Season Two of the Punisher drags at times, due primarily to Netflix's habit of stretching series by half-a-dozen episodes to fulfil the unquenchable demand for new content. Either way, this is the last you'll be seeing from Bernthal's Punisher, with Netflix announcing cancellation of all Marvel-related series following the recent Marvel/Fox buyout. Does this mean we'll see the Punisher popping up in the background of *Endgame*,

shooting random bad guys in the head? We can only hope...

The Verdict

While *Captain Marvel* isn't a perfect movie, it has enough good elements that it's entertaining even when missing what seem like obvious opportunities. The in-name-only inclusion of other comic book Captain Marvels (the alien Mar-Vell, now played by [Annette Bening](#), and the African-American Captain Marvel Monica Rambeau, now played by young [Akira Akbar](#)) seems like a dismissal of the complex history of the character — and if Disney were so keen on embracing diversity, why did they go for the white woman over the black woman, or the illegal alien?

The Punisher (Season Two) is a mixed bag, and probably doesn't have a lot for people who didn't watch Season One. With no disrespect to the supporting cast, The Punisher is one of those shows that lives and dies on the performance of the lead actor. Fortunately, Jon Bernthal is at the top of his game, marking him as an actor to watch now that he doesn't have a regular TV gig keeping him busy.

Captain Marvel: 7/10

The Punisher (Season Two): 6/10

Books by [John Turnbull](#) are available on Amazon and Kindle, including supernatural thriller [Damnation's Flame](#); action/romance [Reaper](#), black comedy [City Boy](#) and travel guidebook [Bar Trek: Europe](#). [Damnation's Flame](#) by John Turnbull is also available in paperback in the IA store [HERE](#) (free postage).