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# 'Ms. Marvel' Director Meera Menon Discusses How She Relates to Kamala Khan and Breaks Down Episode Two's Training Montage


The director, who already worked with Marvel on 'The Punisher,' advocated to help bring the studios' first Muslim character to the screen: "I let them know right off the bat that it meant a lot to me to see that form of representation."

BY **BRIAN DAVIDS**  JUNE 20, 2022 12:44PM



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*Ms. Marvel* couldn't be more different than Meera Menon's last Marvel experience on *The Punisher*, but the story of Kamala Khan certainly strikes a deeper chord in the filmmaker. Similar to Kamala, Menon was raised by South Asian immigrants in New Jersey, so she relished the opportunity to help tell a story that she longed for during her own childhood. The Indian American filmmaker, who directs *Ms. Marvel's* second and third episodes, made it clear to Marvel Studios from the get-go that this project was especially personal to her.

"I just wanted to be a part of it in any way, so I let [Marvel Studios] know right off the bat that it meant a lot to me to see that form of representation. It was seeing something akin to my sense of my own upbringing, and it just felt so meaningful to know that there was a piece of pop culture out there that was so reflective of my own upbringing in so many ways," Menon tells *The Hollywood Reporter*.

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In a recent conversation with *THR*, Menon also breaks down episode two's training montage where Kamala first learns how to harness her newly-discovered superpowers.

**Well, Ms. Marvel is certainly a lot different from your last go-round with a Marvel-related show [*The Punisher*]. Is it hard for you to believe that they're both on Disney+ now?**

*(Laughs.)* Yeah, it feels like I did [*The Punisher*] so long ago. It wasn't that long ago [Jan. 18, 2019], but it just goes to show how quickly things change in terms of platforms.



Iman Vellani as Ms. Marvel/Kamala Khan in Marvel Studios' *MS. MARVEL*, exclusively on Disney+. COURTESY OF MARVEL STUDIOS

**What was the handoff like between you and *Adil and Bilal*? You likely had to maintain the look and feel they established, but did you still have plenty of freedom to do your own thing?**



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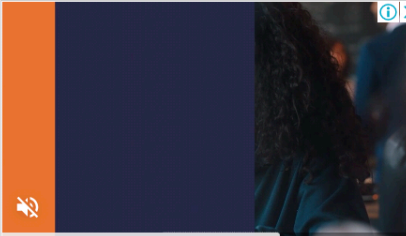
I think so. There was a good deal of both. There were things that were really clear from their episode that we could continue, like certain aspects of the animation and camera movement, but there were other things that were unique to this episode and the next episode that we had to start from scratch with. For example, there were longer scenes, deeper backstories and darker moments between Kamala and her confrontation with the source of where this power is coming from. There's also a new character in the form of Kamran [Rish Shah]. There were just a lot of new elements in episode two that required further invention, but it all started from a place that Adil and Bilall built.

**And similar to those guys, you also took the lead on the visual flourishes that represent Kamala's (Iman Vellani) imagination, right?**

Yeah, that was all stuff we would take the lead on. When I say we, I mean me and the DP of my episode, Carmen Cabana. We really were a team in figuring out how to grab the baton from Adil and Bilall and their DP [Robrecht Heyvaert], and continue forward. So it was absolutely a process of taking the emotional space that the script gave us, like in that sequence where Kamala meets Kamran for the first time and is head over heels for him. So it was our job to take this idea that she's really crushing on this guy and elevate the visual language around it. So, it wasn't necessarily stuff that was already written, but Marvel was so great about letting us develop and flesh out inventive ways to communicate these emotions.



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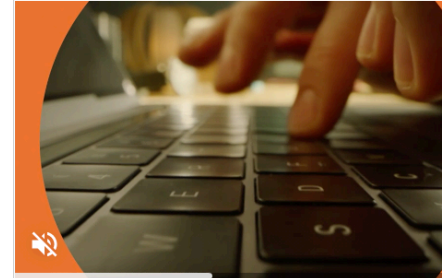


**One of the highlights of any superhero origin story is the inevitable montage where they first learn how to use their superpowers. So, can you talk about putting that sequence together?**

That sequence was a constant work in progress. We were always changing it. We had different ideas, and throughout prep, we were trying different things. We'd done a previs animatic on it and shot a bunch of stuff, and then we went back and shot some more stuff. That sequence was a constant working draft of a document, and that's really reflective of the way Kamala approaches her powers in the story. She doesn't really know what they do or how to wield them properly. There was always this idea that in addition to having to figure out what the light is and where it comes from and how to shape it and how to control it, she also had to be strong enough to wield it, too. So there was always a physical training component of the montage, a montage within a montage.

And there was always that moment where she watches Bruno [Matt Lintz] play the video game, that Donkey Kong moment, where she realizes that she can shape the light into platforms she can jump on, creating a vehicle for herself in the air. Those components were always there; it's just how does she get there, when does she get there, and how many things does she try out before she gets there. So that was always a work in progress and always something in the edit that was being fine-tuned up until nearly the very end. We shot a lot of stuff for it, and hopefully, we gave the edit the opportunity to find the most concise way to communicate that journey.

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## So when you first met with Marvel Studios, what were those initial conversations like? What did you connect over at the time?

I made it clear that from the minute I first read the comics, I was like, “Whenever they do anything with this, I hope I’m in the arena. I hope I’m in relative proximity to the arena, to be in the room to be considered for this.” I just wanted to be a part of it in any way, so I let them know right off the bat that it meant a lot to me to see that form of representation. For me, it was really that. It was seeing something akin to my sense of my own upbringing, and it just felt so meaningful to know that there was a piece of pop culture out there that was so reflective of my own upbringing in so many ways. Not in all ways, but in so many ways. So I really made that clear, and then I also just loved the combination of things. I’ve worked on so many different genres of things, and I love how this show has a little bit of everything. It’s a family story, a teen romcom, a coming-of-age story, a superhero story, an action movie, a thriller. There are these really dark, suspenseful moments with the villains as they emerge. So it has a little bit of everything, and I loved the mash-up.



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(L-R): Yasmmeen Fletcher as Nakia and Iman Vellani as Ms. Marvel / Kamala Khan in Marvel Studios' MS. MARVEL, exclusively on Disney+. COURTESY OF DANIEL MCFADDEN/MARVEL STUDIOS

**The scene at the mosque feels very specific. From stolen shoes and not being able to see or hear the lecture, Kamala and Nakia (Yasmmeen Fletcher) were very frustrated by these issues. Are these common frustrations?**

Absolutely. Sana Amanat, who's the co-creator of the comic and the executive producer of the show, is the keeper and heartbeat of the story, and so many of these storylines are vetted through her and her personal experience. And then there's [Bisha K. Ali](#), who wrote the show, and Adil and Bilall's experiences in the Muslim community. And then we had a whole team of cultural advisers who were constantly vetting the scripts and vetting the things we were about to shoot on any given day. So there were a lot of people bringing their personal experiences to these sequences, and I'm hoping that they come across as authentic at the end of the day, because a lot of people put their own lives and their own sense of selves into the storytelling.

**Well, congratulations on *Ms. Marvel*, and by the way, I really loved your *Halt and Catch Fire* episode, "Signal to Noise."**

Oh my goodness! That's so cool. Next to *Ms. Marvel*, that's my favorite show that I've ever done.

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*Ms. Marvel is now streaming on Disney+.* [TJR](#)