

‘Thor: Ragnarok’ Shatters the Hammer, But Maintains the Mold

Submitted by [JonHC](#) [1] on November 1, 2017 - 2:04pm

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Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Any blacksmith will tell you that their job is much more than the brute action of slamming a hammer onto steel. There is some finessing and an attention to detail that needs to take place in order to make something truly notable. With Taika Waititi manning the hammer, he takes the “Thor” franchise out from the Dark Ages and into the technicolor light.

Taika Waititi is the perfect choice to revive and rebrand Thor from the slump of the last film. His style of visual storytelling, in films like “What We Do in the Shadows” and “Hunt for the Wilderpeople”, fits perfectly in the Thor universe, especially with how heavily steeped in Norse mythology the franchise is. His comedic timing and acuity for visual gags, along with the vibrant color palette, stimulate the cinematic experience and elevate it from the grim grayness of the former films. Waititi completely revamps the film’s overall tone into something equal parts whimsical and sardonic. He takes the similar approach James Gunn took for “Guardians of the Galaxy” and emphasizes the wonders of the universe and gives us a feast for our sense, all while reminding us what a dangerous place it can be. That “dangerous place” sometimes looking dangerously similar to something out of “Lord of the Rings”.



The Asgardians (featuring the Hulk) step into the apocalypse with style in ‘Thor: Ragnarok’

Photo credit: Marvel Studios

To say that this film is much more animated than the previous two is an understatement, which makes sense when you consider that most of the writers have written for Marvel television shows and cartoons. Writers Eric Pearson, Craig Kyle, and Christopher Yost create the kind of

story that is meant to entertain your children but also offer adult-themed fun. I’m not just talking about spaceships made for orgies or having Thor say a swear word, but an engaging adventure. The humor is there, and the punchlines are witty, but much like cartoons, the character and emotional development comes on the shallow side.

Taika Waititi may have given the Thor franchise the renovation it desperately needed, but the final third of the film proves to have the same pitfalls as many of the films before it. I’m not just talking about “Thor” and “Thor: The Dark World” but the entire Disney-led Marvel film universe as a whole. The final third of the film almost seems incongruous to everything we have seen up to that point. This is where the big, epic boss battle takes place and dominates the rest of the film. Not to say that it wasn’t well-done because the visual style was exactly what we have seen in the mass scale battles in “Avengers”, “Guardians of the Galaxy”, “Iron Man 3”, etc. The problem becomes that the two aren’t blended well together tonally. The lively energy and almost whimsical attitude turns overwhelmingly bland in the massive battle where we are forced to watch as the fight plays out exactly how we knew it would. There is always a tinge a dissatisfaction that comes from having to go through the motions, especially in a film that started out doing anything but.



Cate Blanchett looks Hela good, while Karl Urban is the loveable Skurge we know him to be in ‘Thor: Ragnarok’

Photo credit: Marvel Studios

Now, let’s talk about what can easily qualify as a plague on most of these films: the villain problem. I know it’s redundant to call villains a problem, especially since the whole nature of a villain is to create problems, but the problems with the villains in the MCU is that they aren’t properly created or developed. They are these overpowered baddies that are meant to overwhelm or protagonist(s) and force them to go on a strengthening journey meant to empower the heroes to ultimately defeat the villain. That is the formula that is ingrained into every single comic book story and has been translated on screen since the very beginning. It’s a solid formula, and while the foundation of it is sound, anything built on top of it will automatically (at some point) be bland. Cate Blanchett’s true talent and potential were never fully utilized with our villain Hela, mainly because she all but disappeared inside the story up until the end. The best villains are ones we can see ourselves in and sympathize with, and Hela had that potential with her relationship with her father Odin (Anthony Hopkins), but her lack of screentime and fleshed-out storyline just turned her into a generic villain. The villains in this universe exist only to start the initial conflict, and only reappear at the end so they can get their ass kicked and call it a day.

Waititi’s tone is one of the film’s greatest strengths, and it is reminiscent of the “Guardians of the Galaxy” films and even the heavily Edgar Wright influenced “Ant-Man”. The films are all heavy on humor, but all except “Thor: Ragnarok” don’t shy away from the emotional complexity of loss. Earlier this year, “Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2” had one of the biggest emotional gut punches to come from an MCU (Marvel Cinematic Universe) film when we explored the idea of fatherhood and witnessed the death of Mary Poppins AKA Yondu Udonta. Similar themes are explored in this film, and there is exponentially more death, yet it doesn’t seem to affect the character or let us see his emotionally vulnerable side. When the Hulk is the angriest person in the room even after you’ve lost your father, your hammer, most of your friends, at least half of your people, and were dumped by your girlfriend, there is a major emotional problem that isn’t being addressed.



Is Jeff Goldblum the Grandmaster, or is the Grandmaster really Jeff Goldblum? Find out in ‘Thor: Ragnarok’

Photo credit: Marvel Studios

The performances in this film are what helped breathe new life into the old characters. Of course, we had actors like Anthony Hopkins (Odin), Tadanobu Asano (Hogun), Ray Stevenson (Volstagg), and Zachary Levi (Fandral), who only reprised their roles long enough to unceremoniously die. The best character change came in the form of giving Thor an attitude adjustment. In all of the past films, Thor has been forced to repress his comedic nature only so he could deliver bursts of one-liners every once in a while. This new and improved Thor was allowed to show that humor is ingrained into his character, finally letting Chris Hemsworth seem less stiff and have more fun with his character. You especially notice this in his chemistry with Tom Hiddleston (Loki) as they seem to be able to riff off of each other much more naturally.

Although Jaimie Alexander (Sif) was notably absent from the film (and her character hopefully alive for future films), there were two equally badass female characters to represent. Cate Blanchett may have been underutilized as Hela, but the fantastic glimpses we saw of her prove she’s a powerhouse. The best addition to the team is Tessa Thompson (Valkyrie), whose performance has her fitting into this universe seamlessly. This wouldn’t be a Marvel/Waititi collaboration without some eccentric characters, chief among them is Jeff Goldblum as the Grandmaster and Karl Urban as Skurge. Idris Elba and Mark Ruffalo reprise their roles, but with so many new and old characters being shown, they feel very underdeveloped. If there is one character that can sum up “Thor: Ragnarok”, it would have to be Korg, voice by Taika Waititi. His comedic timing and spot-on observational humor make the film the engaging fantasy experience it always should have been.

“Thor: Ragnarok” opens everywhere on November 3rd. Featuring Chris Hemsworth, Tom Hiddleston, Cate Blanchett, Tessa Thompson, Idris Elba, Jeff Goldblum, Karl Urban, Mark Ruffalo and Anthony Hopkins. Directed by Taika Waititi. Written by Eric Pearson, Craig Kyle, and Christopher Yost. Rated “PG-13”



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