Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Rating: «««« out of «««««

Running Time: 130 min.

Believe it or not, *Thor: Ragnarok* marks the seventeenth film in the Marvel cinematic universe, which began only nine years ago. That’s an awful lot of superhero flicks and as someone who sees and reviews them all, it’s difficult not to feel a bit of comic book fatigue. Thankfully, I can report that the latest entry offers a fresh voice with a playfulness that makes it a very enjoyable experience. In fact, it’s the strongest of the three features involving the character.

This episode begins with Thor (Chris Hemsworth) returning to his home world of Asgard, reuniting him with his opportunistic and dangerous brother, Loki (Tom Hiddleston). It’s here where a family secret is revealed and introduced in the from of a dangerous and violent sister named Hela (Cate Blanchett). Known as the goddess of death, she is most unfriendly and decides to overthrow the order, casting her siblings out through a dimensional portal to their presumed death. Thor survives, weakened and without his trusty hammer, finding himself a prisoner on a strange new world run by the Grandmaster (Jeff Goldblum). To save the people of Asgard, the hero attempts to escape and find a way back home.

Like many recent Marvel features, the script is a bit overstuffed. Frankly, it’s filled with an overabundance of characters both old and new, not to mention the several unexpected cameos that pop up as plotlines move forward on two separate planets. The consequence of this story tactic is a movie with a pair of villains (although one is significantly more intimidating than the other) and a plot in which the main baddie is completely removed from the main action for a great deal of the picture. Normally, this would be a serious problem.

Yet somehow, despite the fact that it should get bogged down jumping back and forth between worlds, the film doesn’t show many ill effects. In fact, the end product is actually a whole lot of fun. There’s a hilariously deadpan sense of humor present thanks to director Taika Waititi (*What We Do in the Shadows*
,
Hunt for the Wilderpeople
). The new characters all have amusing and individual quirks that help them stand out. Even the interactions between the established roles have more zip and vigor than seen previously.

Early on, the movie takes great pleasure in torturing and emasculating its hero. Thor can’t seem to catch a break in this tale. He takes all kinds of beatings that surprisingly enough result in a great many laughs. And star Hemsworth has comic timing, excelling whenever called upon to delivering a funny quip. There’s a huge laugh that arrives from one of the greatest indignities forced upon him, as we see the abject terror and fear on his face as a barber moves in for an unexpected haircut. It’s not only very entertaining, but moments like these also do a lot to humanize a character with god-like supernatural abilities.

Everyone around the lead also earn high marks for their work. Goldblum is a hilariously verbose and slimy foe. Additionally, the movie also gets a lot of mileage out of its sibling rivalry. Thor and Loki bicker constantly, and the amusement displayed at each other’s suffering isn’t far removed from fighting children. The Hulk (Mark Ruffalo) also plays a part and gets some good verbal jabs in, as does a warrior/love interest for Thor named Valkyrie (Tessa Thompson). However, the director may have left the best new role for himself with Korg, a rock warrior with an unexpectedly genial and friendly nature.

The enjoyable character work and likable cast adds vitality to the franchise and ultimately connected with this viewer. It just goes to show that sometimes emphasizing humor and character, even in a spectacular popcorn flick, can really elevate the material. *Thor: Ragnarok* is an unexpectedly enjoyable addition to the franchise that certainly ranks in the upper half of Marvel adaptations. Comic book fans shouldn’t be disappointed by what they see.

Note: And for those wondering, there are two post-credit scenes; one setting up a future threat and a final, amusing tag to the main story.

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