

‘Thor: Love and Thunder’ doesn’t hit the bullseye

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

out of «««««

Running Time: 125 minutes

This feature from Marvel Studios and Disney opens at cinemas on Friday, July 8th.

Generally speaking, the rule with film series is that they tend to get weaker and weaker with each subsequent title. One exception to the rule has been the Marvel Thor franchise. While all the movies featuring this superhero have provided thrills, it’s fair to say many would agree that the third feature “Thor: Ragnarok” (2017) most deftly combined action, suspense and a healthy dose of laughs.

“Thor: Love and Thunder” is the fourth and latest chapter in the ongoing series. Truthfully, this sequel doesn’t equal its predecessor, but is still effective enough to impress and not feel like an unnecessary add-on.

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In the previous chapter, the home world of Thor (Chris Hemsworth) ended up being destroyed. In the years since, survivors have resettled on Earth in New Asgard under the leadership of King Valkyrie (Tessa Thompson), while the superhero has been traversing the universe assisting others (and trying to shed some pounds from the last Avengers movie).

Despite keeping busy, Thor feels lonely and lost, navel-gazing and wondering why he hasn’t been able to make a lasting love connection. His personal crisis is put on hold when the dangerous figure Gorr the God Butcher (Christian Bale) emerges with the power to kill any god using his magical blade. Thor returns to Earth and finds that Gorr has targeted New Asgard. The hero gets another surprise after learning that ex-girlfriend/astrophysicist Jane Foster (Natalie Portman) has assumed the Thor mantle and is now wielding his hammer.

Like the previous installment, this effort attempts to combine superhero drama with an equal dose of absurdist humor.

Despite this, the film does begin with a decidedly serious prologue containing an origin story for Gorr. It’s a strikingly shot sequence that makes a strong impression. This character is intriguing and a stand-out among foes in the Marvel Universe. Many villains in these types of features don’t make a lasting impression and come across as overly exaggerated. Thankfully, Bale manages to imbue his intense character with controlled fury and pathos that results in a memorable villain. His behavior is intimidating and adds plenty of gravitas to the proceedings.

And as the plot unfolds, there’s also some heavier drama involving Jane Foster and her rationale for becoming a superhero.

Much of the emotional and dramatic stakes work surprisingly well, but the attempts at humor are uneven. A montage featuring Thor and what he has been up to over the past few years includes a rapid-fire succession of mostly amusing gags. And once again, the title character and other gods featured in the story are consistently poked fun at for their giant egos and personal insecurities. This all works well and there’s some funny material whenever Thor attempts to awkwardly share his feelings and maintain an air of self-importance.

But other jokes feel rushed and don’t land as effectively. Part of the problem may have something to do with the fact that the movie is cut together at such a fast pace. Some of the

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lighter moments come across in a jarring fashion when they follow attempts at more serious drama only seconds earlier.

Of course, a moment of levity via a curious observation typically works in a tense moment, but here there is so much jumping back and forth that the movie does struggle to maintain a consistent tone. The film may have benefitted from a longer breath between these transitions.

Still, over time this franchise seems to have developed its own specific style (likely due to director/co-writer Taika Waititi) that generally works and differentiates itself from other Marvel properties. Plenty of jokes do work, the action itself is impressive to behold and the new antagonist is a noteworthy one. Additionally, the story’s attempts to add some emotional heft to the proceedings are largely effective. So, while it doesn’t hit a bullseye like the previous sequel, “Thor: Love and Thunder” is still a strong entry that justifies further adventures with the legendary superhero.

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