

Thor Ragnarok? More like Thor: I'd rather not.

The latest Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) solo-title film, featuring the god of thunder and his mischievous adopted brother, recently released to much critical and audience acclaim, already making north of \$650 million at the global box office. Unfortunately, like *Batman v. Superman: Dawn of Justice* and *Suicide Squad* before it, audiences seem to be flocking to a film not worth raving about.

This latest entry finds Thor (Chris Hemsworth) captured by Surtur, the Luciferic figure in Norse myth destined to destroy Asgard, only to escape back to Asgard and confirm what the audience has known since the closing of *Thor: The Dark World*, namely that his father Odin (a world-weary Anthony Hopkins) no longer rules because Loki (Tom Hiddleston) has usurped the throne via his father's visage. This sends the brothers on a search for their father that takes them to Earth only to attract the attention of the resident Master of the Mystic Arts (Benedict Cumberbatch), in what is the best extended cameo in a Marvel film in years. These opening beats establish the overall physical comedic tone of the film, one that is drawn upon with disappointing frequency, to replicate *Guardians of the Galaxy* style humor.

It's an encounter with Hela (Cate Blanchett, if she'd taken The One Ring for herself), the goddess of death and long-lost royal sibling, that sends this cosmic buddy-cop film hurtling forward. The sons of Odin find themselves thoroughly bested by their sinister sister and secluded far across the cosmos on Skkar, a gladiator world ruled by Jeff Goldblum (seriously, you wonder if he's just playing himself) while she seeks to claim the family throne. It's on Skkar that an incredible "friend from work" makes a giant-sized debut alongside newcomer Korg, plucked from comics and the animated adaptation of Planet Hulk, and, like in the original Avengers, grapples with the old question "who'd win Thunderdome"?

To catalyze all this gladiatorial gamesmanship, a character emerges eager to earn her pay and drink it away to forget her past. Once a formidable warrior of Asgard and leader of an all-female fatal force, Valkyrie (Tessa Thompson) wants nothing to do with rescuing her home. Nevertheless, the needs of Asgard bring these characters together in hopes of contending with Hela and preventing Ragnarok.

At its heart the film is a tale of loss: of people, purpose, and place and living in light of the reality of those losses. While this is a worthy chord to strike, and a moral to tease out, especially in light of the film's conclusion, any attempt at lasting depth is overshadowed and undermined by the near-constant attempts at humor that seem out of character - for most of these characters and the solo franchise as a whole - due to their prevalence. Whereas the first *Thor* struck a balance between shakespearean drama and comedy and *Thor: The Dark World* was far more serious and brooding, *Thor: Ragnarok* swings the pendulum not back to a place of balance but completely in the other direction.

In Hollywood a thread has emerged in the telling of longform stories across multiple movies, wherein the third entry seems to pale in comparison to what has preceded it. *Return of the Jedi*. *Godfather III*. *The Search for Spock*. *Alien 3*. *Terminator 3*. *Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome*. *X-Men: The Last Stand*. *Spider-Man 3*. *X-Men: Apocalypse*. *Superman III*. It's enough that *X-Men: Apocalypse* acknowledges it, in true meta fashion, with a screening of *Return of the Jedi* and, while debating which film in the original Star Wars trilogy is best, all agree that "the third one is always the worst". While this is seen as a tacit admission as to the quality of *X-Men: The Last Stand*, it also applies to *X-Men Apocalypse*, the third of the newer X-trilogy, as well as the third entry in multiple longstanding franchises.

Much to my disappointment, I can not only add *Thor: Ragnarok* to that list but echo the wisdom of a troupe of superpowered teenagers.

While many of these films can be seen as acceptable on their own, divorced from the material that spawned them, when taken in full view, the picture is disappointing. *X-Men: Apocalypse* actually contains a scene wherein a young Scott Summers, Jean Grey, and Jubilee attend a screening of *Return of the Jedi* in 1983 and, while debating which film is best, all agree that "the third one is always the worst". While this is seen as a tacit admission as to the quality of the previous third film in an X-Men trilogy, *X-Men: The Last Stand*, it actually applies somewhat to the film that states it, in light of *X-Men: First Class* and *X-Men: Days of Future Past* before it. To be fair, this "third entry theme" isn't always the case, as shown via *Captain America: Civil War* (which also functions as a "third" Avengers film), *Revenge of the Sith* (the strongest entry amongst the Star Wars prequel trilogy), *Return of the King*, *Logan*, and *Star Trek Beyond*.