

Brooke Chai

COMM 1001

Dr. Roberts

## **Film Critique**

### ***Thor: Ragnarok***

*Thor: Ragnarok* is the third movie in the Marvel Universe telling the story of Thor, the Norse god of thunder. In addition to Marvel's usual action-packed, almost predictable doomsday setting hinged on the success of the film's protagonist, Thor has a funny, laugh-out-loud DNA to its structure. From the opening scene, it is very clear that it isn't supposed to be another replica of the tried and true Marvel movie formulas, and throughout the movie the audience is able to see how *Thor* brings spikes of laughter and hits of self and political realization.

The opening scene begins with what seems to be a monologue by Thor, who is captured in a cage hanging above an abyss. As he speaks, I almost expected him to break the fourth wall, but the scene pans to the skeleton sitting across from him, obviously the previous prisoner held by the cage before him. It's a funny scene that shows a lot about what is to come and the style this movie takes. I was pretty shocked that they placed a humorous element that early on, when a majority of other Marvel movies start off with intense scenes designed to pull the audience into the Marvel Universe.

I fully expected Thor to make eye contact with the camera, and thus the audience, Office-style, or even Deadpool-style. This expectation itself showed how much mass media production has changed. In recent years, media convergence has made it normal for the consumer to connect with the producer, and even for the fans to connect with the

character. I think that the rise of social media, and how connected the world is becoming through technology naturally allowed for production styles to reflect that convergence to a point where I was even expecting a break in the fourth wall to happen. When I was a kid, I would have never expected that from any of movies I watched. Although it didn't happen in the movie, just the expectation of it happening prompted me to think about why I did, and how that reflects our expectations of media to continually connect the audience and the content more and more.

One of the main reasons why so many people were ready to watch *Thor* is because it is part of the Marvel franchise, it attracts a certain community and people like myself have built a subculture around the Marvel superhero movies. It's interesting to see the massive following of modern superhero comics in the late twentieth century has translated to a massive following of the superhero film adaptations. There is definitely a subculture that is appreciated surrounding the films that build up around the Avengers. Most fans watch all the Marvel movies to keep up with the plot and character developments; they enjoy the action and the feel-good endings. They also often also watch the Marvel television series that feature other heroes, and take place in the outskirts of the main Avenger's plotline. Albeit, recently the fandom has grown enormously, and people who prefer all different genres come together to enjoy these films, and slowly there isn't a specific subculture that is being identified as strongly as there was just a few years ago, it is, by the best definition, now becoming mainstream.

Along with being downright hilarious, *Thor* hits on the point of evolving with his audience. Like Fawaz (2016) discussed, consumers want to see content that actually mirrors their realistic situation in some way. They no longer want to see the black and

white butt-kicking superheroes of the early 1900s (Fawaz, 2016). Instead of presenting a Norse god with a hammer that is invincible, Thor's hammer, his identity so far, is taken from him and he must learn who he is without it.

Watching Thor after reading and discussing *The New Mutants* opened my eyes to see how this comic based movie reflected pressing social and political situations in our world, much like how X-Men did during the time it came out. It seems timely that the plot and characters of Thor showed how people get treated as outsiders, and for me, how the characters were treated in Sakaar. Sakaar is already a realm that is composed of all the "unloved" things of the galaxies, a kind of intergalactic dump. Even in a place where everyone comes from somewhere else and no one inherently belongs, a social structure is formed at the expense of the weak and the powerless. Thor is made to fight as a gladiator for entertainment. Sadly, it reminds me of America today, and the Grandmaster of Sakaar, with his loudness and absurd sayings remind me of our President. The way that the Grandmaster sporadically projects his image through the city in short bursts and declaring action and opinions does remind of President Trump's Twitter activity. Even in the beginning when Thor asked Loki where he put their father, and Loki brought him to a senior home on Earth, was a comedic irony because a god from another realm did the exact same as the humans on this Earth, and caring for the older generation is almost a taboo subject in reality.

Along with the clear-cut message of Asgard being a people and not a place, there were so many small parallels to lessons that the audience could take away to reality, like treating newcomers equally, believing in your own worth, and not giving up when it's hard or seems hopeless. *Thor: Ragnarok* truly was a wacky and fun movie that was so

different from the past two Thor movies, and I was able to thoroughly enjoy it because I was better equipped to watch between the lines and see the relationship this piece of mass media and society.

#### References

Fawaz, Ramzi. *The New Mutants: Superheroes and the Radical Imagination of American Comics*. New York University Press, 2016.