

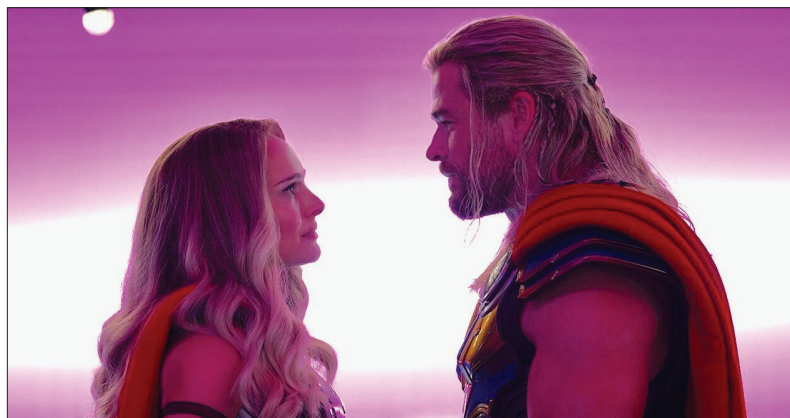
'Thor: Love and Thunder' wants to be a rom-com

By Katie Walsh

Tribune News Service

Someone has got to put Thor out of his misery. That's the setup of "Thor: Love and Thunder," but it also becomes a larger existential question after taking in this middling installment, the latest version of "twee Thor" from co-writer and director Taika Waititi. While the Oscar-winning Kiwi darling's "Thor: Ragnarok" provided an infusion of fresh humor into the MCU back in 2017, "Love and Thunder" proves the bloom is off the rose when it comes to Waititi's cutesy take on the God of Thunder.

"Love and Thunder" is the fourth "Thor" movie and the second co-written and directed by Waititi, who teams up with Jennifer Kaytin Robinson on the script. The film is decidedly a "comedy," rooted in Waititi's signature brand of cheeky forced



Natalie Portman, left, and Chris Hemsworth star in Marvel Studios' "Thor: Love and Thunder." Jasin Boland/ Marvel Studios

cheer. It's a whole lot of silly accents and bum flashes and an ongoing gag involving screaming goats (remember that?). The script's comedic sensibility feels straight out of 2012 Tumblr, and the abuse of '80s heavy metal font, too many Guns N' Roses needle drops, and Chris Hemsworth's cheerful himbo performance as Thor

can't salvage that.

It's a superhero movie that would rather be a rom-com, but the two genres don't play nice here. The story revolves around the love lost, and found again, between Thor and his ex-girlfriend Dr. Jane Foster (Natalie Portman). Jane turns to Mjolnir in a time of need, and finds herself transformed

into Mighty Thor. A bumbling, but sweet, re-union between the exes commences. However, we also need to see Thor in action, so enter Christian Bale as Gorr, the antagonist. Gorr has lost his daughter and his faith in the gods, so he's taken up a magic sword, a new nickname (the God Butcher) and a new hobby of killing gods. Thor's got to stop him and save the children of New Asgard, whom Gorr has spirited away to a cage in the shadow realm.

Gorr's arc, rooted in real motivation, stakes and most importantly, sincerity, is the most profound emotional journey in the film. In Bale's performance there's a sense of myth, grandeur and devastation. He takes it seriously, which the rest of the characters in this film do not. It's all winky-nudgy irony and banter that would be tolerable if it were at least funny.

The script is lacking, but so too is the big screen spectacle, which is why we go to these movies in the first place, right? "Love and Thunder" might be the worst-looking MCU movie in a long time, crafted in the crushingly dull house style with ironic '80s details randomly splashed about. The most visually interesting part of the film is a scene set on a shadow realm bug planet rendered in stark black and chrome.

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