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## Latest 'Thor' film heavy on bloodline, light on storyline

**T**olstoy famously pronounced, "Every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way," and the Odinsons, who rule a world called Asgard, are spectacularly dysfunctional.

A jocular thread runs through "Thor: Ragnarok," giving its star, Chris Hemsworth, a chance to flex his comedic muscles (as well as the others), and making him more relatable to bro-verse fans than the flowing-haired heart-throb of the first "Thor" movie.

But the banter does not neutralize the film's ultimately dispiriting nihilism.

Ragnarok is a prophecy that is actually referenced in Norse mythology. Sometimes translated as "Twilight of the Gods," Ragnarok is the equivalent of Armageddon in Christian religions — the destruction of the world through fire.

In the movie, the titular prophecy is meant to foretell the destruction of Asgard. ("I hate that prophecy," declares one character, rolling her eyes.)

It is Thor's job to prevent Ragnarok from happening.

"Thor: Ragnarok" opens with Thor, trapped Houdini-style in a cage dangling on a chain, as he is subjected to the kind of interminable exposition that supervillains like to inflict upon their in-



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tended victims. The fire demon Surtur is explaining how Ragnarok works. Surtur doesn't understand why Thor would bother to try to save Asgard. It's too late — the prophecy has already begun.

"Because that's what heroes do!" declares Thor.

Not so easy, since Thor's adopted brother, the trickster Loki (Tom Hiddleston), god of mischief, has shipped their dad Odin to an earthly old folks' home. Now their once mighty father, dimming in life's twilight, is drifting into the wind like embers blowing from a campfire.

With Odin out of the picture, his firstborn, the aptly named, antler-tiaraed Hela (Cate Blanchett), is released from

captivity.

She fought at her father's side in the years he was amassing his empire through warfare and bloodshed. Her lust for violence was beyond control, so he imprisoned her. Now he is too weak to suppress her.

"I'm the goddess of death," she bitterly taunts Thor, as she smushes his face into the ground, sisterly. "What were you the god of, again?"

Thunder versus death. She's made her point.

Thor's mighty hammer, made from the heart of a dying star, is pulverized into smithereens. Like Dorothy of Oz, Thor must learn this device was never the source of his power; it was only there to help him control it.

Now Hela is raising an army of the dead to reclaim the throne of Asgard, while Heimdall (Idris Elba) leads the Asgardian opposition.

Hammerless, Thor finds himself on Sakaar, a planet junkyard filled with lost and unloved things that is ruled by the disco-loving slave-owning Grandmaster (Jeff Goldblum). On Sakaar Thor reunites with the Hulk/Bruce Banner (Mark Ruffalo) and tries to enlist Valkyrie (Tessa Thompson), a surviving member of the legion of women warriors who were massacred by Hela in an early

battle for Asgard.

Nether of them wants to get involved. "I don't want to fight your sister. It's a family thing," explains Banner.

Besides, the only escape from Sakaar is through a roiling, gaseous portal called The Devil's Anus.

Like a Saturday-morning serial, the characters lurch from one catastrophe to another without any particular resolution. There is fistfight followed by swordplay followed by gunfire, ad infinitum.

The movie is visually stunning, with awesome computer generated effects and a rocking soundtrack, but there is no particular storyline.

And there is so much arcane disquisition on topics of family history, galactic rivalries and Nordic prophecies, that one can't help but zone them out as they drone on like the voices of the grown-ups in a Charlie Brown animation.

There is no optimism, either — just a cynical cycle of sibling bickering and betrayal. All of the relationships are insecure, and there is none of the all-for-one solidarity that makes worlds worth fighting for.

As the credits roll, there is ominous foreshadowing that tells us more is to come, beating on into the next dystopian future.

That's what heroes do.