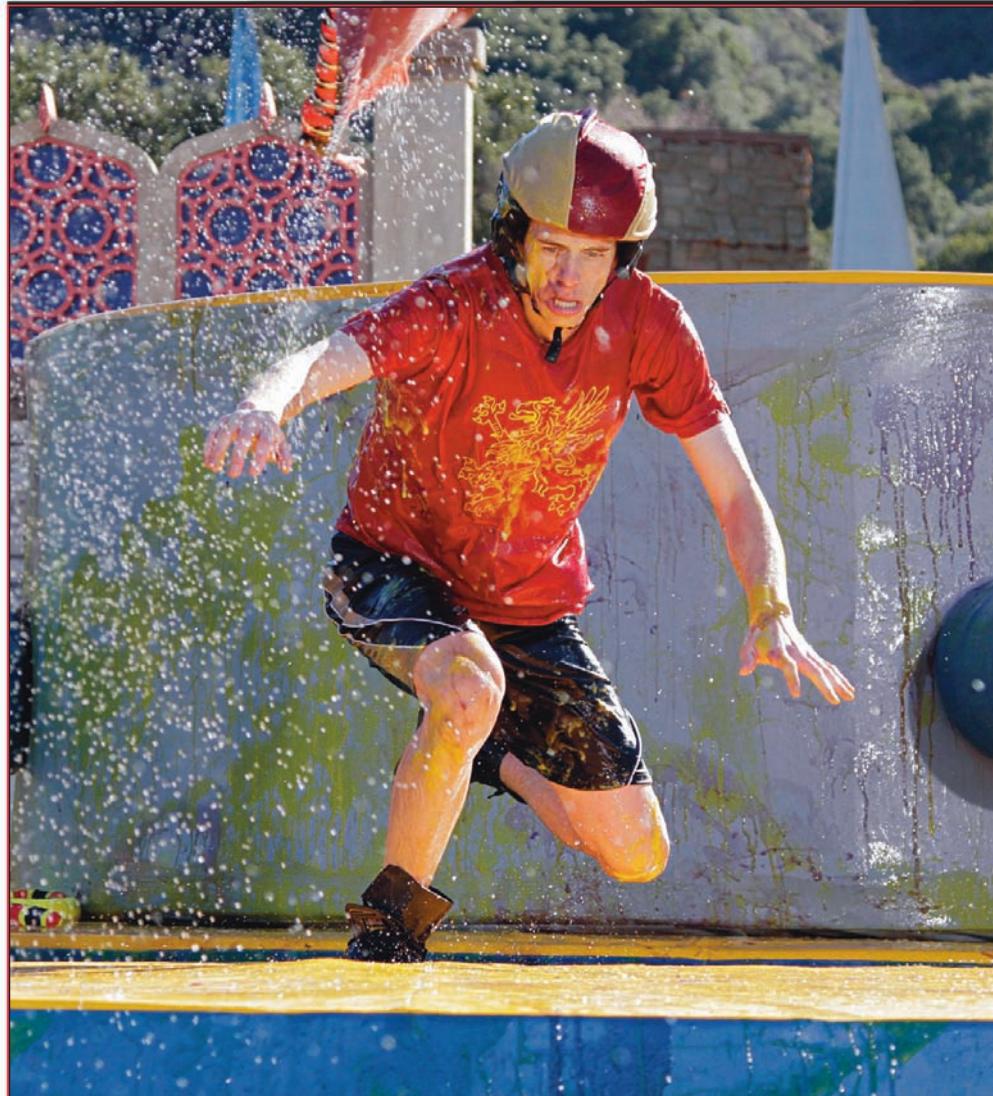


TELEVISION PROGRAMMING FOR MAY 14-20, 2011

# TV The Journal view



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## “Wipeout” signs off ... but not for long

The season finale of “Wipeout” airs Thursday on ABC.

See Page 4 for more details.

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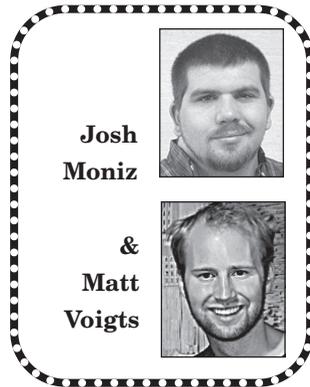
# Double Take: "Thor"

**Josh:** All thunder, no lightning  
**Matt:** Fun but not much spark

**Josh:** For the first summer blockbuster of the year, "Thor" is a perfectly acceptable superhero movie. All the usual big-scale battles are there, with above average actors fill out the cast.

What makes this film interesting is that it straddles the two modern trends of superhero movies. The first is the "fish out of water" plot, crystallized with the first "Spiderman" film, where the character is getting the handle of his new powers. In this form, the powers are unusual and the hero is exceptional for having them. The second is the equivalence of Greek mythology, where many heroes have their own unique power and they each pursue their competing interests. In this, the powers are taken for granted and people without powers are the outsiders. Essentially, everyone is Hercules on a quest.

"Thor" starts with Thor's realm, which is populated by Norse god "superheroes." This part of the film could have easily been mistaken for "Clash of the Titans," and is the film's best. The heroes are interesting and acted by an all-star cast. The monsters, the villainous Frost Giants, are engaging and interesting, despite being



**Josh  
Moniz**

**&  
Matt  
Voigts**

based on a concept that could have easily been corny. It was a smart move to not only give them the ability to speak, but make them like another nation. The villain, Thor's trickster brother Loki, is better developed than the typical trickster villain. Instead of simply lying, he mixes in insightful bits of truth to cut with his words. Even though Loki orchestrated the incident that sparks the plot's conflict, Thor is a brash, vain hero that put other people at risk for his ego.

That brings me to Thor. He's a typical hero, essentially Superman with a hammer, but he's watchable because he has some complexity. At the start, he is arrogant and head strong. He genuinely causes more damage than good. This makes you more interested in his heroic ending because he has actually had character development.

On the bad side, I saw the film in 3D, which was pointless. Almost no scenes had 3D effects, and even fewer



Odin (Anthony Hopkins) rules Asgard, but his sons Thor (Chris Hemsworth, left) and Loki (Tom Hiddleston, right) vie for the crown.

needed them. Additionally, the middle romantic interlude had absolutely no effect on the plot. Finally, I suspect people that don't know the Norse mythology will find random portions of the film ridiculous. For example, when Thor's hammer returns like a boomerang without explanation, I'm sure some people will be confused because they don't know that's part of his mythology.

**Matt:** While I agree with Josh that Thor's flaws don't stop the movie from being enjoyable, I disagree that the title character is more complex than your average superhero. He's different as a hero, a bit of a dunderhead who learns a pat lesson, but he and every other character in this movie have the consistency of cardboard – functional, sturdy, and highly corrugated, but still

pretty thin. Especially Natalie Portman's "scientist" – the Norse God's love interest – who spends most of her time on-screen insisting that her research is very important and highly scientific without ever explaining what it is. In real life, most people who do this are con artists, stark raving mad, or some combination thereof.

Of course, a lot of Thor's "heavy on characters, light on characterization" style is what you find in superhero comics – I could easily see this as the story arc of, say, Thor issues #1-3. And in comics – which can be made on the cheap and have stories that can continue indefinitely – I find this easier to forgive. On the silver screen, it comes off as slight. And while director Kenneth Branagh keeps the tone of the movie light enough throughout, he doesn't seem interested in developing that

tone in a unique enough direction to make it distinctive. There were hints of what could have been an off-kilter, delightfully campy ride in some of the movie's genuinely funny bits, but the overall package just doesn't have the ingenuity or courage to be the next "Iron Man" or "Pirates of the Caribbean."

But then, Thor isn't really being designed to launch a "franchise" in the sense that there will be a "Thor 2" and "Thor 3" – its top priority appears to be paving the way for next summer's "Avengers" movie that will unite the Norse God of Thunder with Iron Man, Captain America, and The Hulk, among others.

**Josh:** I agree with Matt that the main reason that Thor seemed to be made is as an advertisement for "The Avengers." It's an annoying trend that has been occurring in the Marvel adaptations. I understand that it's an effort at marketing and its closer to comics, but part of what makes films like "The Dark Knight" good are their minimalization of comic book melodrama. The worst case of this is "Iron Man 2," which was starting to develop an interesting plot, but completely drops it in order to make vague allusions to "The Avengers" the second Samuel Jackson's Nick Fury character shows up. It last for so long, the film never really gets back on track.

Something I thought was

interesting about the love-interest segments is that it was kind of like a romantic comedy where the love interest's "zany" characteristic is that he believes he's Thor. I would love someone with quality editing skills recut the film as a comedy, with the pay-off joke being him actually getting powers at the end.

**Matt:** I would watch the heck out of the romantic comedy Josh just described. It would be like "Kate and Leopold" with more hammerings. And semi-seriously, that's what I wanted from this movie. Somewhere inside – hinted at in scenes like the one where Thor battles hospital orderlies trying to subdue him – is a delightfully absurd comedy struggling to break free. There are other hints of it, too, in the plasticity sets and costumes from veteran production designer Bo Welch. For what could have been, check out the live-action show "The Tick" – on which Welch worked – available on Netflix instant watch.

**Josh:** A solid superhero flick and a fine blockbuster start to the summer. Just skip the 3D.

**Matt:** Don't let anything I've said stop you from seeing the movie – it is fun, just not unique.

**Josh: 6.5/10; Matt: 5.5/10**

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