Hebe Barlow, "Entry on: Thor: Ragnarok by Kevin Feige , Craig Kyle, Eric Pearson, Taika Waititi , Christopher Yost", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy and Elizabeth Hale. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2020). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1039. Entry version as of July 12, 2026.

Kevin Feige , Craig Kyle , Eric Pearson , Taika Waititi , Christopher Yost

Thor: Ragnarok

United States of America (2017)

TAGS: Gladiator Games Gladiators Norse Mythology

We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	Thor: Ragnarok
Studio/Production Company	Marvel Studios
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	Worldwide
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2017
First Edition Details	*Thor: Ragnarok*. Directed by Taika Waititi, written by Eric Pearson,Craig Kyle and Christopher Yost, produced by Kevin Feige, Marvel Studios: 2017, 130 min.
Running time	130 min
Format	DVD
Date of the First DVD or VHS	DVD: February 20, 2018
Awards	NAACP Image Awards – Outstanding Supporting Actor in a Motion Picture – Idris Elba; Teen Choice Awards – Choice Sci-Fi Movie Actor – Chris Hemsworth.
Genre	Action and adventure films, Comedy films, Science fiction, Superhero films
Target Audience	Crossover (Teens and Adults)
Author of the Entry	Hebe Barlow, University of Birmingham, HXB459@student.bham.ac.uk

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Susan Deacy, University of Roehampton, s.deacy@roehampton.ac.uk Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au

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Creators

Retrieved from Wikipedia, uploaded by TonyStank1434. Licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0 (accessed: January 11, 2022).

Kevin Feige , b. 1973
(Producer)

Kevin Feige is an American film producer, who has worked as the president of Marvel Studios since 2007, and the chief creative officer of Marvel Entertainment since 2019. He is a member of the Producers Guild of America. In 2019 he was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Picture for producing *Black Panther*, the first superhero film to receive a Best Picture nomination. In addition, it was the first film in the Marvel Cinematic Universe to win an Academy Award. The film *Avengers: Endgame*, which Feige produced, became the highest-grossing film of all time in 2019.

Source:

Profile at imdb.com (accessed: April 17, 2020).

Bio prepared by Hebe Barlow, University of Birmingham, HXB459@student.bham.ac.uk

Craig Kyle , b. 1971
(Screenwriter)

Craig Kyle is an American Screenwriter and Producer. He is best known as the creator of the character X-23 for the animated television series *X-Men: Evolution*. Kyle produced a number of Marvel's direct-to-DVD animated films, and has been involved with several aspects of the Thor film series.

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Source:

Profile at wikipedia.org (accessed: April 17, 2020).

Bio prepared by Hebe Barlow, University of Birmingham, HXB459@student.bham.ac.uk

Eric Pearson , b. 1980
(Screenwriter)

Eric Pearson is an American screenwriter. He attended New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, where he studied screenwriting. Since enrolling in Marvel Studio's screenwriting program in 2010, Pearson has worked on a number of projects for the Studios, including *Thor: Ragnarok* (2017) and *Black Widow* (2020).

Source:

Profile at wikipedia.org (accessed: April 17, 2020).

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Taika Waititi by Gage Skidmore, 2019. Retrieved from Wikipedia, licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0 (accessed: January 11, 2022).

Taika Waititi , b. 1975
(Director)

Taika David Cohen (known professionally as Taika Waititi), is a New Zealand filmmaker and actor. He studied theatre at Victoria University of Wellington and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in 1997. He is best known for both directing and starring in the films *Thor: Ragnarok* (2017) and *Jojo Rabbit* (2019). He is the first person of Maori descent to win an Academy Award in a screenplay category, having won the Best Adapted Screenplay for his 2019 film *Jojo Rabbit*. It also made him the first indigenous person to be nominated (and to win) in the Academy Awards category of Best Adapted Screenplay.

Sources:

Profile at imdb.com (accessed: April 17, 2020).

Bio prepared by Hebe Barlow, University of Birmingham, HXB459@student.bham.ac.uk

Christopher Yost , b. 1973
(Screenwriter)

Christopher Yost is an American film, animation, and comic book writer. He is best known as the head writer of the Marvel Comics animated series, *The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes*. Yost graduated from the University of Michigan with a degree in film and

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video. He has been associated with Marvel Studios since 2002 when he worked as an intern. He was a member of the Marvel Writers Program, and has worked as a screenwriter for Marvel Studio's Marvel Cinematic Universe.

Profile at wikipedia.org (accessed: April 17, 2020).

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Additional information

Casting	Chris Hemsworth – Thor, Tom Hiddleston – Loki, Cate Blanchett – Hela, Idris Elba – Heimdall, Jeff Goldblum – Grandmaster, Tessa Thompson – Scrapper 142/ Valkyrie, Karl Urban – Skurge, Mark Ruffalo – Bruce Banner/ Hulk, Anthony Hopkins – Odin.
Sequels, Prequels and Spin-offs	*Thor* (2011). *Thor: The Dark World* (2013). *Thor: Love and Thunder* (2021).
Summary	Two years after the battle of Sokovia, the fire demon Surtur has imprisoned Thor. Surtur reveals that Odin, Thor's father, is no longer on Asgard. Surtur explains that after he has united his crown with the Eternal Flame burning in Odin's vault, the prophesised Ragnarok will come about, and Thor's realm will be destroyed. Thor frees himself, defeats Surtur, and takes his crown, believing that he has prevented Ragnarok. Returning to Asgard, Thor finds that the protector of the Bifrost (the bridge between Asgard and Midgard (Earth)) Heimdall (a character based off the Norse god Heimdallr), is gone. Thor also discovers that his brother Loki is posing as Odin, using his magical powers to fool the citizens of Asgard. After forcing Loki to reveal himself, Loki admits that he placed a spell on Odin and left him in an old person's home on

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Earth. Travelling to Earth, Thor and Loki discover that the home has been demolished. After Loki disappears through magic, Thor follows a business card which leads him to Stephen Strange (a superhero introduced in the 2016 film *Doctor Strange*) in the Sanctum Sanctorum in New York City. Strange helps Thor to locate Odin, with Thor and Loki travelling to Norway. Finding their father, who has regained his memory, Odin explains that he is dying, and that Ragnarok is imminent. He reveals that after his death, his firstborn child, Hela (the goddess of death, based on the Norse goddess Hel) previously unknown to the brothers, will be released from a prison she was long ago sealed in. Odin explains that Hela was the leader of the armies of Asgard, helping to conquer the Nine Realms alongside Odin. However, fearing that she had become too ambitious and powerful, Odin imprisoned Hela, writing her out of history. After Odin dies, Hela appears, quickly destroying Thor's hammer Mjolnir. Thor and Loki attempt to flee through the Bifrost, however Hela pursues them and forces them out into space. Having arrived in Asgard, Hela quickly defeats its army and kills the Warriors Three (a group of characters appearing as supporting cast members throughout the Thor franchise). Hela then resurrects the ancient dead who had once fought alongside her, including the giant wolf Fenris (based on Fenrir, a monstrous wolf in Norse mythology). Hela then appoints the Asgardian Skurge to be her executioner. She plans to use the Bifrost to expand Asgard's empire. However, Heimdall reappears, removing the sword which controls the Bridge and begins to assist Asgardians in escaping the city and hiding from Hela and her forces.

Thor crashes onto the planet Sakaar, a garbage planet surrounded by wormholes. Attacked by a crowd of its inhabitants, they are defeated by a slave trader who goes by the title Scrapper 142. Scrapper 142 proceeds to subdue Thor with an obedience disk embedded in his neck which electrocutes him until he is unconscious. Gaining consciousness, Thor finds himself strapped to a chair and presented with a holographic account of the rise of Sakaar and a figure known as the grandmaster. Meeting the grandmaster, it is revealed that Scrapper 142 has sold Thor to the grandmaster to appearing the Grandmaster's Contest of Champions. As Thor will later discover, this contest is a form of gladiatorial combat, the first time such a plot has been introduced in the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU). Thor then discovers that Loki is also present on Sakaar, although his brother arrived before him and has used his time on the planet to integrate himself with the Grandmaster.

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Thrown into a dungeon like area, Thor meets other gladiators including a figure named Korg. Korg reveals that the Grandmaster's Champion (who Thor will have to face) has never been defeated, and kills everyone who faces him. Thor learns that Scrapper 142 is one of the Valkrior, the legendary force of female warriors who were killed may eons ago. Thor is then forced to compete in the Contest of Champions, where he discovers that the Grandmaster's Champion is his old friend, Hulk. During the fight, Thor discovers an ability to summon lightning, and is able to gain the upper and. Before his Champion can be defeated however, the Grandmaster uses the obedience disk embedded in Thor's neck to ensure his defeat. After the fight, Thor attempts to convince bother Scrapper 142 and Hulk to help him to save Asgard, although neither wishes to help him. Eventually, Thor escapes the palace, and discovers the which brought Hulk to Sakaar following the battle of Sokovia. Entering the Quinjet, Hulk watches a recording of Natasha Romanoff which forces Hulk to transform back into Bruce Banner.

Thor and Hulk join forces with Scrapper 142 (now referred to as Valkyrie) and Loki to escape Sakaar. Before leaving, the group liberate the other gladiators in order to create a distraction. The gladiators, led by Korg, stage a revolution and themselves steal another ship. Returning to Asgard, Thor and his allies fight and defeat Hela, although Asgard is destroyed in the process. Watching the destruction of Asgard, Thor decides to take his people to Earth.

Analysis

Whilst the third film in the *Thor* franchise, *Thor: Ragnarok* is the first to incorporate allusions to Roman gladiatorial combat. The decision to deliberately fuse gladiatorial and alien elements was highlighted by Dan Hennah, the production designer of *Thor: Ragnarok*. Hennah stated:*

> "The early concept work that I inherited was largely Roman based gladiatorial and it's been done so often that the sandals have worn out… It's time for something new and so we sort of went all alien with it."

Although Hennah never clarifies precisely what work he here refers to, it could perhaps be that of concept artist Aleksi Briclot. Whilst the final designs for the gladiators of *Thor: Ragnarok* were not based on Briclot's work, it is worth noting that he explicitly stated the

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connection between his designs and specific Roman gladiatorial types. For instance, "I've based my first proposals on the usual gladiator types: this one being close to a Thracian or a Secutor", "He's based on the gladiator type called Retiarius, with a trident and a net".**

Whilst the term "Contest of Champions" is used within *Thor: Ragnarok*, the audience quickly discovers that it refers to gladiatorial combat. During the holographic introduction to Sakaar and the Grandmaster, images of pairs of figures fighting are displayed along with the term "Contest of Champions". Thor's new status as a gladiator is explicitly confirmed with the introduction of the character Korg, another slave/ gladiator. Striking up a conversation, Thor asks Korg, "How did you end up here?". Korg replies:

> "Well, I tried to start a revolution, but didn't print enough pamphlets so hardly anyone turned up. Except for my mum and her boyfriend, who I hate. As punishment, I was forced to be in here and become a gladiator. Bit of a promotional disaster that one, but I'm actually organizing another revolution. I don't know if you'd be interested in something like that? Do you recon you'd be interested?"

Here, the word "gladiator" is used for the first time in relation to the Contest of Champions, confirming for the audience what may already have been suspected. Whilst Korg's character is primarily comedic, he can also be seen as a Spartacus like figure thanks to his role as the leader of a gladiator rebellion. It is possible that some audience members may recognise this story arc due to a familiarity with the historical figure, or the 1960 epic historical film featuring Kirk Douglas. However, it is perhaps reasonable to assume that contemporary audiences would be more likely to draw comparisons with other modern Spartacus like figures such as Katniss Everdeen in *The Hunger Games* franchise, or the HBO television series *Spartacus* (2010–2013). *Thor: Ragnarok* does not make the comparison between Korg and Spartacus explicit however, perhaps suggesting that the film is simply making use of a standard cinematic trope regarding gladiators. Despite having been imprisoned for his first attempt at a revolution, Korg continues to hope and plan. Later in the film, during the escape from Sakaar, Valkyrie is viewed providing Korg with an alien weapon. Korg declares "The revolution has begun!", before successfully leading the escape of the remaining gladiators.

Before Thor enters the arena of *Thor: Ragnarok*, the Grandmaster's

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"Champion" was an anonymous figure. This Champion's deadly nature is revealed by Korg, who states that "Everyone who fights the Grandmaster's Champion perishes". Loki also highlights the danger that awaits Thor, warning, "I haven't seen this beloved Champion… but I hear he's astonishingly savage". Indeed the deadly nature of Sakaaran gladiatorial combat is emphasised through the depiction of two guards dragging away the body of a defeated (and presumably deceased) gladiator. Entering the arena, Thor and Loki discover that the famed Champion is Hulk, Thor's friend and fellow Avenger. Despite the warnings Thor previously faced, the combat between Thor and Hulk ends with the survival of both gladiators. An audience watching the gladiator fight of *Thor: Ragnarok* would be unsurprised by the survival of both Thor and Hulk. They are, after all, both key members of the MCU, and with additional upcoming films announced for this series, the death of either character would be implausible.

The arena of *Thor: Ragnarok* bears a striking visual resemblance to the Roman amphitheatre, and to the Colosseum in particular. Viewing the Sakaaran city for the first time, a large open-aired and circular building is seen. Whilst there is nothing here to confirm its use as a gladiatorial arena, the inference could be reached by those familiar with the general architectural design of the Colosseum. Whilst there are 252 known amphitheatres in the western empire, with approximately another twenty in the Greek east, the Colosseum remains the best known example of an amphitheatre in the mind of the general public.*** According to the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities, the Colosseum received over 13.4 million visitors in 2016–2017.**** Even those who have not visited the site, may be familiar with the Colosseum through its depiction in films such as *The Core* (2003), *Jumper* (2008), *Angels & Demons* (2009), and *Spectre* (2015).***** Others may recognise it from videogames such as *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood* (2010) and *Ryse: Son of Rome* (2013). Due to the fame of the Colosseum and its frequent appearance in popular media (whether based in the Roman world or modern times), it seems reasonable to assume that cinematic audiences both understand what is meant by a Roman arena, and are familiar with its basic design. The visual similarities between the Colosseum and the Sakaaran arena, alongside the inclusion of terms such as gladiators, and discussions of fights to the death, would simultaneously take advantage of any classical knowledge cinematic audiences may already possess, whilst providing enough information for those unfamiliar with Roman customs to easily comprehend the plot.

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Indeed, the familiarity of the Sakaaran arena is unsurprising, since Hennah admitted that "Early on we looked at ancient Roman arenas".****** It is later confirmed that this structure is the Sakaaran amphitheatre. Whilst never viewed from directly overhead, the design of an arena floor surrounded on all sides by seating is successfully communicated. This is achieved through the elliptical form of the building itself, and the layout of its audience. Tracking shots show the spectators standing in neatly organised segments, which follow the curvilinear form of the building. At no point is an area depicted lacking audience accommodation, implying that spectators watch from all sides. That spectators do not sit during the entertainment, is an adaptation seemingly specific to *Thor: Ragnarok*. Hennah noted that, "We toyed with a lot of different concepts", finishing with an arena "surrounded by bleachers which have standing up bleachers, not sitting down".*******

Thor: Ragnarok also follows the cinematic tradition of the imperial box, as depicted in historical films such as *Gladiator* (2000), *The Eagle* (2011), and *Pompeii* (2014). The Grandmaster, Loki and other unidentified inhabitants of Sakaar are shown watching the Contest of Champions from this location. Their separation from the general crowd has immediate connotations, building on the stereotypes of decadent, excessive, and tyrannical rulers. The Grandmaster may watch the Games from a sofa, but his position as an Emperor-like figure has already been established. He is first depicted in an opulent golden throne room, surrounded by guards and women who may be concubines. Later, the Grandmaster is portrayed wielding a futuristic sceptre which acts as an execution device, killing his own cousin without mercy. The audience thus comprehends that not only is the Grandmaster flamboyantly decadent, but also tyrannical – tropes traditionally associated with the Roman Emperor. Indeed, the Grandmaster's echoing of a Roman Emperor is identified by the authors of numerous articles.

Whilst it is possible some audience members may possess a classical education, it can be assumed that most do not, and that instead their understanding is built on popular representations of the Roman world – such as cinematic and televisual works. Of course, such works do not focus on the issue of "accuracy", filmmakers are not historians, nor do they develop their scenarios for an audience of historians in mind. Instead, films rely on well-established motifs, imported elements from parallel traditions, and moments thematically consistent with the tone of the film. Thus, whilst an audience member may never have studied

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the classical world in an academic sense, they may be familiar with certain aspects thanks to other works previously encountered. Since the turn of the Twenty-First century cinematic portrayals of ancient Rome have once again gained popularity, thanks to works such as *Gladiator* (2000), *Rome* (2005 – 2007), *Spartacus* (2010 – 2013), *The Eagle* (2011), and *Pompeii* (2014). Within each of these works examples of gladiatorial combat are present (although to varying degrees). It is possible that audience members of *Thor: Ragnarok* have previously watched such works, thus producing a frame of reference for their understanding.

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* Jane Fujikawa, "Jack Kirby's Design Influence Is A Force In 'Thor: Ragnarok'", marvel.com, published October 19, 2017 (accessed: June 1, 2019)

** Aleksibriclot, *A gladiator for Thor*, Instagram, published December 1, 2017 (accessed: March 17, 2020); *Another gladiator for Thor*, Instagram, published December 13, 2017 (accessed: March 17, 2020).

*** Susanna Shadrake, *World of the Gladiator,* Stroud, 2005; Jerry Toner, *The Day Commodus Killed a Rhino: Understanding the Roman Games*, Baltimore: MD, 2014.

**** Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities, "2017. ALL #MUSEITALIANI NUMBERS" (accessed: June 22, 2019).

***** *The Core* 0:49:16; *Jumper* 0:39:46; *Angels & Demons* 0:14:16; *Spectre* 0:29:37.

****** Carolyn Giardina, *How 'Thor' Production Designers Created a "Hulk-Sized" Bed*, November 8, 2018 (accessed: June 18, 2020).

******* Jane Fujikawa, *Jack Kirby's Design Influence Is A Force In 'Thor: Ragnarok*, published October 19, 2017 (accessed: June 18, 2020).

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs,

Gladiator Games Gladiators Norse Mythology

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Characters, and Concepts	
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Future Good vs evil Heroism Journeys Magic Magic powers Murder Parents (and children) Past Pop culture references Prediction/prophecy Princes and princesses Siblings Superheroes Transformation Travel Tricksters Truth and lies Violence

Further Reading

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