Once worshipped as the “god of thunder” and still heir to the throne of Asgard, the Realm Eternal, the Mighty Thor is not exactly a paragon of humility. And considering that Thor is perhaps the greatest fighter in the universe, and that he has a magic hammer that literally strikes like lightning, and to top it off that he’s virtually immortal, in a way it’s hard to blame him. But Thor’s impetuousness goes too far one day, and a raid into the land of the fabled Frost Giants plunges Asgard into a war Thor’s father, the wise Odin, had long sought to stave off. Enraged, and moreover forced to admit that Thor is more of an “arrogant, cruel boy” than a crown-prince, Odin strips Thor of his enchanted hammer (the nearly unpronounceable Mjolnir) and god-like powers and banishes him to Earth. There, a fallen angel of sorts, Thor must come to terms with mortality and learn the self-sacrifice that leads to wisdom and makes for a real hero.

It’s an epic saga worthy of, well, Norse mythology at its best, and the cast and crew bring it to life with aplomb. Star Chris Hemsworth isn’t really a newcomer (he played George Kirk in the 2009 Star Trek) but it’s hard to deny that Thor is his big coming out party. Hemsworth takes on a role that is literally bigger than life and nails it, not just the physical feats of Thor as a superhero but as a man from another world, a world in which honor and courtesy—a type of chivalry—is absolutely not dead. Hemsworth talks, walks, and fights exactly like longtime fans of the Thor comic book would expect their favorite thunder god to.

But Hemsworth gets a lot of quality help. Natalie Portman continues her recent hot streak with a strong performance as Jane Foster, the mortal girl Thor falls in love with. Anthony Hopkins, naturally, is a definitive Odin. But perhaps the film’s finest performance, and certainly its most complex, is Tom Hiddleston as Loki, Thor’s brother and traditionally recognized as the Norse god of evil. But Hiddleston’s Loki is no stereotypical comic book villain. He is a tragic figure, with complicated motivations and great aspirations, who believes that someone simply must save Asgard from the immature Thor. And, the thing is, that at the beginning of our story, he is certainly correct.

There isn’t room here to give proper credit to the dazzling special effects, the well-wrought script, or Kenneth Branagh’s Shakespearean direction. Suffice it to say that Thor is one of the ten best comic book films yet made, and a must-see for any fan of action or fantasy.