

From Asgard to Earth: **Thor** hits the big screen

Thor is an ancient Norse god whose story was adapted to the Marvel comic book universe by Stan Lee, Larry Lieber and Jack Kirby in 1962. Now Thor and his world are being brought to the cinema by director Kenneth Branagh and cinematographer Haris Zambarloukos, BSC. Both have been fans of *Thor* comics since boyhood.

"The comic book origins of the project meant that we could break a lot of the rules around composition, color and symmetry," says Zambarloukos. "Kenneth and I are also fans of Jack Kirby, who brought a trippy sensibility to the comic artwork, and we were able to translate some of that to the screen."

Two contrasting worlds were created for *Thor*. One is Asgard, Thor's otherworldly homeland. "We decided that Asgard required a perfectly soft, shadowless, golden light that is everywhere without practical motivation," Zambarloukos explains. "We surrounded the stage with massive, manoeuvrable softboxes with incandescent bulbs and half-grid diffusion. This type of light is very flattering, and it can also be intimate and moody, allowing for some modeling on faces. It also gave Kenneth and the actors freedom in blocking, and it meant we could light quickly."

The other world depicted in *Thor* is Earth. These scenes were filmed mainly at desert locations in New Mexico. "We wanted to play with the idea that in one place there is absolute reality even though people are walking around in capes and superhero suits," adds Zambarloukos.

As with *Mamma Mia!* and *Sleuth*, Zambarloukos shot in anamorphic format, which results in a 2.4:1 widescreen aspect ratio. He used Panavision G-series lenses and KODAK VISION3

500T Color Negative Film 5219 in interior and stage situations. He preferred KODAK VISION2 50D Color Negative Film 5201 for the harsh, New Mexican exteriors.

"I love 5201 Film," he says. "For me, with 5201 in anamorphic format on an exterior shot, you're not that far off 65mm. The color is great. It's slightly harsher than 5207 or 5219, and that helped contrast our earthly, real world and our softer look in Asgard, which we shot on 5219."

The film's latitude was crucial in the New Mexican scenes where the script sometimes called for shots going from extremely bright interiors to dark interiors. "I was riding the aperture, doing two- to three-stop dynamic changes within a shot," he recounts. "I can't imagine what it would have been like on a digital format."

"To my eye, film has a more pleasing portraiture range with better flesh tones than digital capture," he says. "The choice of format is a story tool. If you want someone to look like a mythological Norse god, you want to, in some way, idealize them. And to me, the edge-out-of-focus and flaring that anamorphic brings combined with the latitude, softness and flattering look of film, gives this make-believe world a more believable look. It's set in a mythological time. So wherever you can bring reality into it, you want to do that. Unconsciously, digital feels a little distant, and we couldn't afford that with this movie."

A longer version of this article is available on the Kodak website. Please follow the links to *InCamera*.



(L to R) Chris Hemsworth and Anthony Hopkins in Marvel Studios' *Thor*. (Photo Zade Rosenthal ©Marvel Studios 2011)