

‘Man of Steel’ is Strong, But Not Completely Heroic

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on June 14, 2013 - 4:28pm

- [Amy Adams](#) [2]
- [Christopher Nolan](#) [3]
- [Diane Lane](#) [4]
- [Henry Cavill](#) [5]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [6]
- [Kevin Costner](#) [7]
- [Lawrence Fishburne](#) [8]
- [Man of Steel](#) [9]
- [Michael Shannon](#) [10]
- [Movie Review](#) [11]
- [Patrick McDonald](#) [12]
- [Russell Crowe](#) [13]
- [Superman](#) [14]
- [Warner Bros. Pictures](#) [15]
- [Zack Snyder](#) [16]

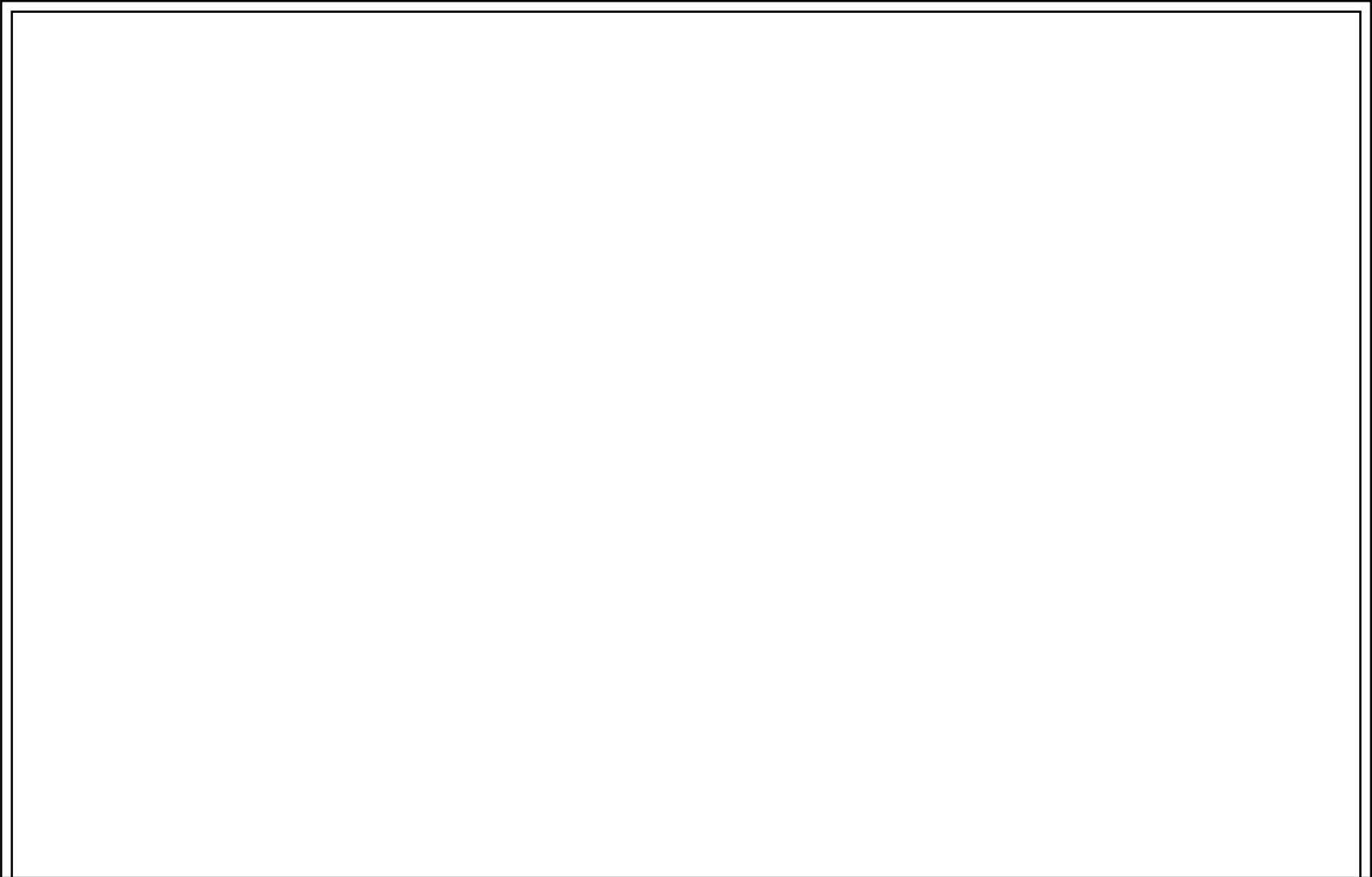


Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Place the Superman legend into the hands of director Zack Snyder (“Watchmen”) and storyteller/producer Christopher Nolan (“Dark Knight”), and old Supes is bound for a makeover in “Man of Steel.” When it works, it’s adds to a legend’s richness. When it doesn’t, it is less than hero.

This film relates the Superman story once again, the “strange visitor” from the Planet Krypton. It adds some iconography, as the film lingers on Superman’s home planet before the explosion, and expands on his childhood years on earth. It focuses – as the second film in the Christopher Reeve Superman series did – on General Zod and his revenge upon Kal-El (Superman’s Kryptonian name) as they confront each other on our planet. And many factors are determined to get Kal to the Superman stage, including a moral dilemma of being both an outsider and potential protector of earth. Many of these narrative elements clashed in parts, and that clash is the like Kryptonite (to use a term) for the story, but there is also the rich addition of a “man and superman” psychology to an individual who, after all is said and done, is just a farm boy from Kansas.

The core of the planet Krypton is coming apart, and top scientist Jor-El (Russell Crowe) is pleading before the government council to enact an evacuation procedure. At the same time, a attempted government takeover occurs, as General Zod (Michael Shannon) seeks an overthrow and also takes Jor-El into custody. But the scientist escapes, and the attempted overthrow is a failure, with Zod and his associates sentenced to exile in the Phantom Zone, an outer space suspended animation.





Can You Read His Mind?: Henry Cavill is Superman in ‘The Man of Steel’
Photo credit: Warner Bros. Pictures

Meanwhile, the core of the planet continues to implode. Jor-El and his wife Lara place their only son Kal-El in a rocket bound for earth, just before Krypton’s destruction. Once Kal lands on earth, he is adopted by Jonathan and Martha Kent (Kevin Costner and Diane Lane). Aware of his powers, the Kents raise the boy – now named Clark – and hides those powers from society, in order to find the right time to introduce them. It is only when the boy becomes a man (Henry Cavill), that the truth of these origins will begin the process of creating Superman, if only he can stop General Zod, newly freed from his exile.

Where is Lois Lane (Amy Adams), the Daily Planet newspaper and Perry White (Lawrence Fishburne)? They become background participants – and in the case of Lois, a discoverer – in the modern day retelling of the story, as the focus remains on the wandering soul of Clark Kent and the threat of General Zod. This retools the familiar origin, in which Clark was fully realized long before meeting Lois and the Planet gang. Lois is now part of introducing Superman to the world, which adjusts her role accordingly.

And that becomes one of the problems. Amy Adams is miscast as Lois Lane, she has no gravitas to support her “Pulitzer Prize winning” status. She is clumsily curious, instead of powerfully so, and it diminishes the Lois role as unwelcome shrillness throughout the adventure, and Adams can’t make it any better. Also hunky Henry Cavill as Clark/Superman looks so young that the potential of the Lois and Clark romance becomes almost cougar-like.

The General Zod story could have also been modified. The narrative has to work out the implosion of Krypton, the coming to earth of Kal-El, his reformation as Clark Kent, his young adult wandering soul period, the introduction of Lois and by-the-way, the General is back. Even though it becomes the first motivating mission for Superman, it’s addition does feel a bit shoehorned. This was the same situation in DC comics and Warner Bros. adaptation of “Green Lantern” (2011). The lesson should have been that “less is more,” especially when the film includes the superhero origin.



Perry White (Lawrence Fishburne) and Lois Lane (Amy Adams) in ‘The Man of Steel’

Photo credit: Warner Bros. Pictures

Having said all that, the film does reach heights that the other Superman adaptations have not. It explores the soul of an alien being, cut off from his culture and infused with Americana (Clark watches a Kansas Jayhawk football game, and wears a KC Royals tee-shirt), and Kevin Costner is patiently stoic and symbolic as Jonathan Kent, becoming a guiding force for the eventual Superman. Although there are Jesus parallels – and the film piles it on – the story is about a person who has powers beyond understanding, and has to wrestle with the dilemma of destiny. The film handles these delicate sensibilities with respect and honor, for one of America’s most revered pop cultural icons.

Besides truth, justice and the American way, there has to be a small nod to the overwhelming notion of just being Superman. When we look to the skies, it could be a bird, it could be a plane, but it also could be just a Midwestern man. It’s refreshing that “Man of Steel” acknowledges all of what is possible.

“Man of Steel” opens everywhere June 14th. Featuring Henry Cavill, Amy Adams, Michael Shannon, Russell Crowe, Diane Lane, Kevin Costner, Harry Lennix, Richard Schiff and Lawrence Fishburne. Screenplay by David S. Goyer, from a story by Goyer and Christopher Nolan. Directed by Zack Snyder. Rated PG-13.



[17]

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- [4] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/movie-review/diane-lane>
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