

## Exploring an Inverse Superman Makes ‘Brightburn’ Shine

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on May 25, 2019 - 4:31am

- [Being](#) [2]
- [Brightburn](#) [3]
- [Clark Kent](#) [4]
- [David Denman](#) [5]
- [Elizabeth Banks](#) [6]
- [Hero](#) [7]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [8]
- [Jackson A. Dunn](#) [9]
- [Matt Jones](#) [10]
- [Meredith Hagner](#) [11]
- [Michael Rooker](#) [12]
- [Movie Review](#) [13]
- [Patrick McDonald](#) [14]
- [Sony Pictures Releasing](#) [15]
- [Super](#) [16]
- [Superman](#) [17]



Rating: **4.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – The opening to the 1950s “Adventures of Superman” TV series includes the words “strange visitor from another planet.” But because Supes had used his subsequent powers for good, he eventually was found not so strange. What if, however, he had been evil, and used his powers destructively? The new film “Brightburn” speculates on such a phenomenon.

The premise is simple, yet could have been so easy to mess up. The creators – producer James Gunn (“The Avengers” series), director David Yarovesky, with writers Brian and Mark Gunn (James’ brother and cousin) – take care to use the situation as symbolism for adolescent emergence and emphasis an outside force (puberty?) as changing the power dynamic within this “superman.” There is so much to unpack in a tight story, there could be a new cinema wing built just to analyze it. It’s powerfully absorbing as well, never shying away from its thesis, even depicting graphic death of good people. This ain’t your granddaddy’s comic books.

Tori (Elizabeth Banks) and Kyle (David Denman) Breyer are a married couple who cannot conceive children. As fate would have it, a giant meteor falls near their farmland, which turns out to be a space craft carrying a toddler boy. Without alerting authorities, Tori and Kyle adopt Brandon (eventually Jackson A. Dunn), as they name him, and settle in for domestic bliss.





Fuji Gabesta, His Eyes are Burning! Jackson A. Dunn is ‘Brightburn’  
*Photo credit: Sony Pictures Releasing*

Ten years later, the boy is now 12 years old, and beginning to assert his adolescent changes. But with him it comes with sleepwalking, a connection to his hidden space vehicle and the use of his newly discovered super strength. With this power a strict disobedience emulates from Brandon, and he eschews parental, institutional and moral authority. He is out to change the world his way.

Yep, what if Superman decided to destroy rather than save? That’s pretty much the premise of “Brightburn,” but the Gunns and director Yarovesky twist it into unsavory knots of violence and anger from their super human. There are some really thoughtful symbolic conceits involving teenage transitions, parenting, sexuality and authority enforcement (law, school, adults). It really speaks to the situation of the now, as in wasn’t it lucky that Clark Kent/Superman landed in Smallville in the 1940s, as perceived in our minds. How would the modern world f\*\*k up a superhero?

Another category of how the film works is authenticity. The casting was done with a “real persons” look in mind, and even lovely Elizabeth Banks is sporting fried hair and dark roots. The Breyers are not the Kents, obviously, but their sincerity and love are there, rooted more in 2019 than the old-timey family values of Superman. This is not to say this era would produce an evil super being, but our values are definitely different, and the world gives more excuses to destroy it instead of saving it.



The Origin of Doom in ‘Brightburn’  
*Photo credit: Sony Pictures Releasing*

The kid actor (Jackson A. Dunn) who portrays Brandon/Brighburn – he named his persona after his hometown – is properly intense, and handles a range of transitional anger and emotions throughout his process of becoming evil. The relationship and separation from his parents is the most interesting part of the evolution, filled with the anxieties that every adolescent faces, but most do it without the ability to wreak havoc. The approach was both psychological and philosophical, with deep symbolic dives into the Freudian concepts of the id (instinct), the super-ego (morality) and ego (force in between id and super-ego). I am Superman, indeed.

So much to analyze about “Brightburn,” which also is effective just on a surface level. In considering super abilities, in this alternate reality the higher you fly the deeper you go. “Look, up in the sky! It’s a bird! It’s a plane! It’s the end of the world! .... “

*“Brightburn” opens everywhere on May 24th. Featuring Jackson A. Dunn, Elizabeth Banks, David Denman, Matt Jones, Meredith Hagner and Michael Rooker. Written by Brian and Mark Gunn. Directed by David Yarovesky. Rated “R”*



[18]

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<http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/29432/exploring-an-inverse-superman-makes-brightburn-shine>

**Links:**

- [1] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/users/hankq>
- [2] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/being>
- [3] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/brightburn>
- [4] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/clark-kent>
- [5] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/david-denman>
- [6] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/movie-review/elizabeth-banks>
- [7] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/hero>
- [8] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/movie-review/hollywoodchicagocom-content>
- [9] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/jackson-a-dunn>
- [10] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/matt-jones>
- [11] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/meredith-hagner>
- [12] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/michael-rooker>
- [13] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/labels/review.html>
- [14] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/movie-review/patrick-mcdonald>
- [15] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/sony-pictures-releasing>
- [16] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/super>
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